The Apocalypse

A Brief History

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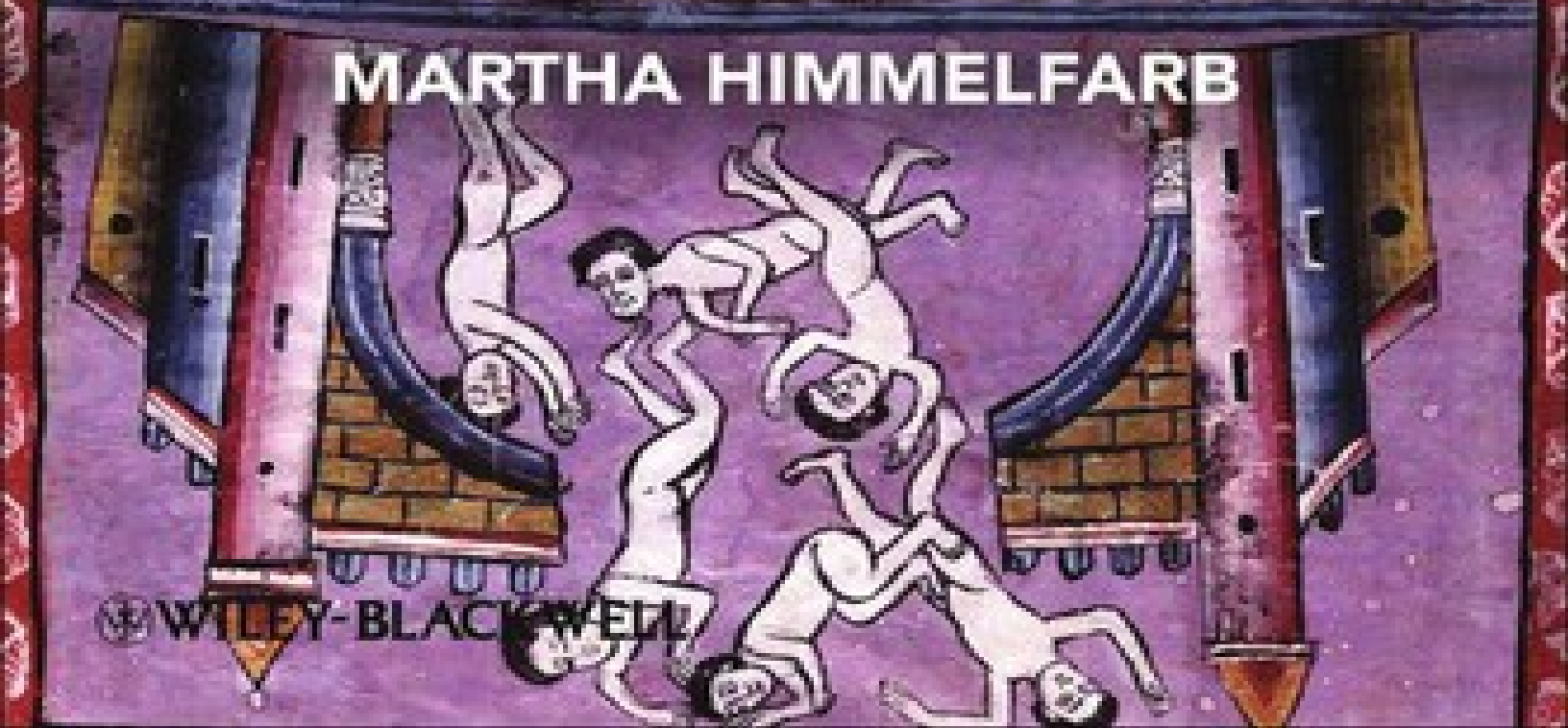

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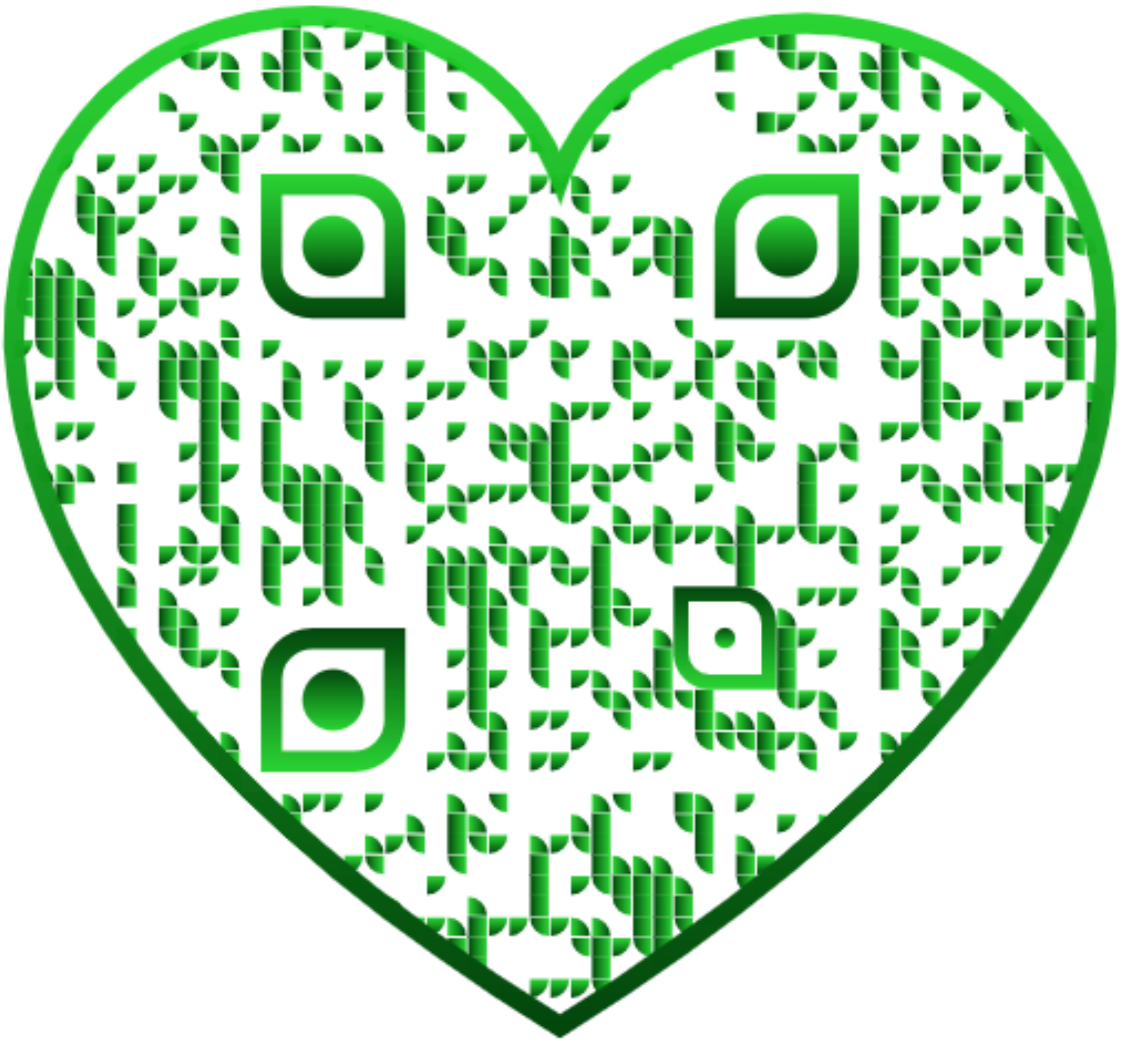

A HISTORY OF THE APOCALYPSE

SECOND EDITION

Catalin Negru

Kindle Direct Publishing

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Cover design by: Ana Grigoriu
Proofreader: Harish S.

First edition (ebook): 2015

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Introduction

If religion is the opium of the masses, then the beliefs about the end of the world are overdoses. The belief in the imminent end of the world is one of the most powerful motivations of the human psyche. It has the ability to generate incredible powers by setting into motion large masses of people and converting their feelings into a collective force. People caught in this kind of phenomena are capable of actions out of the ordinary; they can commit the most shocking cruelties or, on the contrary, account for the most exceptional cases of human societies.

The idea of the end of the world is far from being a novelty. Since the dawn of time the social pools have been disturbed by ideological droplets about imminent catastrophes, divine interventions or final events. And these droplets caused mostly waves of chaos, destruction and death. No matter how accurate the calculations, no matter how widespread or how well-grounded the interpretations, no matter how much faith was invested or how clear were the signs, when it comes to the end of the world people have failed every single time.

Nowadays apocalyptic manifestations – if they are not emanated by scientific authorities and backed by thorough calculations – are associated with insanity, manipulation and fraud. In the past, however, they were serious businesses, often driven by the best of intentions. Many and surprising elements of the contemporary culture owe their existence to an embarrassing apocalyptic project. Religious and social aspects that we see as modern have been in fact part of a phenomenon that started as apocalyptic and, due to the mutations caused by failures, evolved and took more stable and distinct shapes. The fact that the years 2000 or 2012 raised worldwide apocalyptic concerns was not a coincidence; this appreciation comes from a millenary

tradition which we inherited without questioning.

This book is not about how things are, but about why things are the way they are. The apocalyptic phenomenon is a part of the larger phenomenon of religion, which in turn is a part of the even larger phenomenon of history. Nothing simply happens; everything happens because of something. Religion and apocalypticism cannot be understood without understanding the historical context they came from. Every prophecy, prediction or messianism is the product and the precise image of the context from which it emerged. Historical context is the key to understanding the apocalyptic phenomenon because it reveals the true face of miracles: prophecies turn into lies, divine visions turn into simple fantasies of delirious minds, entire doctrines or religious systems prove to be shameless plagiarisms. The context, however, involves a multitude of factors, starting from the political situation of a given moment and ending with the scientific discoveries that revolutionized the world. Throughout the millennia the end of the world has not been announced only on religious grounds, but also on historical, mathematical, geographic, mystical, astronomical or astrological ones.

Most of the Christian apocalyptic manifestations have taken place on the continents of Europe and North America. Accordingly, two millennia of apocalypticism cannot be analyzed without taking into account the most important events in Europe starting with the 1st century and the most important events in America starting with the 16th century. Indeed, the cases exposed in this book represent only a fraction of all apocalyptic manifestations which have emerged. But no one can say their exact number and, most importantly, they are not all of the same value. The goal of this book is not to enumerate isolated events, but to reveal religious mechanisms, to explain the apocalyptic phenomenon as a whole and to offer a new and clearer perspective on religion in general.

Part I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF APOCALYPTICISM

Chapter I. THE FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE

1. THE MEANINGS OF THE EXPRESSION "END OF THE WORLD"

We read about it in books, we saw it in movies, we heard about it over the radio or during religious ceremonies. It is an extremely popular subject. But what exactly is the end of the world?

The expression "end of the world" may refer to a multitude of things depending on time, place, culture or religion. The first term, "end," may signify: disappearance, extinction, destruction, transformation, extermination or death. In turn, the term "world" can have the meaning of: humanity, mankind, civilization, Christianity, Islam, the Universe, Earth (planet) or a group of people. Accordingly, the expression "end of the world" might mean the transformation of humanity, the extinction of the human race, the destruction of Earth, the eradication of Christianity, the transformation of the Universe, the fall of civilization or a significant transformation of the environmental conditions.

The idea of the end of the world may arise from two independent sources: empirical observation and divine revelation.

2. THE ROOTS OF FATALISTIC BELIEFS

2.1. EMPIRICAL OBSERVATION AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL ROOT

Will the world ever end? The environment shows us over and over again that nothing lasts forever: plants, insects, animals, humans, rivers, mountains, planets, stars and even the Universe itself – everything is governed by the law of succession between existence and nonexistence. It is, therefore, easy and totally reasonable to think that the world will cease to exist at some point. In reaction to this state of things we humans work, study, invent, built, expand, breed, help each other; some are ready to give up their lives for their children, while some prepare themselves expressly for the end of the world – all to ultimately avoid the greatest fear: the failure of the species. The prospect of

losing the multimillenary achievements or to disappear as a species is our worst nightmare; even worse than personal death.

Fear is one of the most important survival mechanisms in the animal kingdom. But so is curiosity. People don't just run from danger, they also play with it, study it and ultimately come to manipulate it. The end of the world is not only scary, but fascinating as well. It is not only a source of stress, but also an instrument that satisfies certain needs. It gives people the feeling that they can control their own destiny. Like magic or fairy tales, the prospect of the end helps man forget his worries; it pulls him out of the monotony of the present time and it transposes him, at least for a short period of time, in an out of the ordinary spatial and temporal context. The general end makes the individual feel special; it gives the impression that, by assisting in an event of such grandeur, his destiny is not trivial.

Most apocalyptic messages speak about the present time or the near future, placing the transmitter and the receiver in a possible material context. Current events, which can influence current subjects, gain crucial importance. Every generation of people think that their problems are the most important ever. As history flows without interruption and doomsday scenarios fail, the following generations focus on their own contemporary events, ignoring or underestimating the past. In this way people always see "signs" in their times and the end of the world is constantly a fresh subject.

The idea of an approaching end is often validated by an alleged worldwide decadence: "the world is decaying," "everything is going from bad to worse," "it is not as good as before," or "people have become worse." [1] In Zoroastrianism Zarathustra laments the continuously decaying times; in Hinduism the current world is in *Kali Yuga* , the fourth degenerated era; or in the Abrahamic religions God resets mankind through a global flood as a punishment for mankind's corruption. Nevertheless, all religions relate evil with immorality and disorder, and good with morality and order. If the world has indeed become worse in terms of morality, then this should be reflected in the material plan through an increasing disorder. While it is true that mankind has suffered ups and downs, it becomes increasingly ordered. This means that the idea of a universal decline has nothing to do with an actual decadence of times, but with the decay of the one who emanates such a

judgment. This usually comes from older persons who have no idea about history, who are no longer in power and whose future can bring them nothing else but more weakness and suffering. Any change can only be for the worse because only the days of their youth were promising. A golden age is placed in the past, the decadent present is condemned and the future is imagined even darker. [2] Everything which is new is wrong and only what is old is good. The age, or the test of time, is seen and promoted as an irrefutable proof of correctness and legitimacy. In this way at the level of the masses, traditions and absurd beliefs continue to be practiced only because they have the support of hundreds or thousands of years of existence.

2.2. DIVINE MANIFESTATION AS A THEOLOGICAL ROOT

The religious concept of the end of the world can be found in the cultures that contained a myth of universal creation. The myth of the world's birth and the myth of the world's death are antagonistic and they were built on the ancient pattern of the battle between order and chaos, good and evil, light and darkness, life and death. They expressed the idea of universal duality and at the same time they were instruments through which human societies attempted to create a frame for understanding the passing of time.

Regardless of religion, the end of the world event does not simply happen, out of nowhere and totally un expected. It is a phase of mankind's destiny. In Northern European mythology everything came from chaos, including the gods, which in turn created mankind. But, due to the decadence of the world and the expansion of evil, a final battle between good and evil would bring the beginning of a new cycle of human existence. In Chinese mythology, which contains several myths of creation, the world was created through the ordering of the chaos by the primordial gods; but one day the dragons that pull the Sun in a cart would get drunk and, not being able to pull it anymore, time would stop. Persian mythology says that the world was created from the battle between the good gods and the evil gods, and at the end of time the world would be purified through a final battle between the two sides. Noah's Flood, which is also an end of the world event, can be found in the Sumero-Akkadian myth of Gilgamesh. [3] The Romans were obsessed with prodigies, omens and signs, and they believed that civilization started with them and

would also end with them. According to legend, 12 magical vultures sent by the gods revealed to Romulus, who killed his brother Remus, the place where to found the city of Rome. The Roman calendar had as its starting point the foundation of Rome, the year 1 *Ab urbe condita* (which means “from the founding of the city”), correspondent to the year 753 BC in the modern calendar. But these vultures also symbolized the 12 *saecula* (generations) of existence of the city, after which it was going to be destroyed by the gods. [4]

The disappearance of civilizations and religions led to a subsequent disappearance of the doomsday scenarios. And since the 7th century the idea of the world’s end has been disseminated mainly by the Abrahamic religions.

Chapter II. THE THEOLOGICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL BASES

1. THE ABRAHAMIC ESCHATOLOGICAL ROOT

Abraham is the father of the monotheist beliefs of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. [5] According to the Book of Genesis, Abraham was part of the tenth generation from Noah and the 20th from Adam, the first man created by God. A tribal chieftain of the Iron Age, Abraham was urged by God to leave the Chaldean borough Ur Kaśdim and head toward Canaan. In Canaan Abraham made a covenant with God: in exchange for accepting Yahweh as god, he was blessed with lands and countless descendants (Genesis 17:2-9), while his name was changed by God from “Abram” to “Abraham,” which means “father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:5). [6] This is how the history of Abrahamic monotheism began.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are generically called “Abrahamic religions” due to the crucial role Abraham has in their holy books and because they share the following similarities:

(1) Monotheism: they praise an exclusive god, known by different names.

(2) The holy texts: they are based on a body of texts considered to be the

Word of God, sacred and infallible, whose purpose is to inform the people about the divine will.

(3) An ethical orientation: man must constantly choose between good and evil.

(4) The duality of human existence: the human being consists of the material body, that dies, and the soul, that remains alive after death and it carries the person's essence.

(5) Jerusalem: considered a sacred place.

(6) The prophetic tradition: God is guiding mankind through revelations and prophets. But each religion rejects the revelations and the prophets of subsequent religions.

(7) A prophetic agent: each religion has at the core of its doctrine an agent (mediator) who communicated the divine message to the people. For Jews Moses talked with Yahweh and wrote the Torah. For Christians the life, the teachings, the sacrifice and the resurrection of Jesus Christ are the core of the New Testament. And Muslims believe that Muhammad received the rev elation of the Quran from God through Gabriel the Archangel.

(8) A vision of the end (eschatology): there will be a future moment when divine intervention will stop the course of history.

Eschatology is the theological branch that studies mankind's final events. Its object of research is not only the event of the end of the world, but also the events related to it. Eschatology is not a special feature of the Abrahamic religions; any religion that speaks about the end of the world has its own eschatology.

Each Abrahamic eschatology was born together with the religion it is a part of, and each of the three religions developed their own eschatological scenario. Judaism and Jewish eschatology appeared first, sometime in the Bronze Age. In the 1st century AD Christianity formed its own eschatology by taking parts from the Jewish doctrine. And six centuries later Islamic eschatology was conceived on the basis of Christian and Jewish ideas. Due to

the similarities and the cultural clashes that have taken place over centuries, numerous apocalyptic Christian theories make reference to the nature and the evolution of the other two religions. Therefore, knowing the tenets of the three religions and of their eschatologies is vital for understanding the causes that led to the Christian apocalyptic manifestations.

2. JEWISH ESCHATOLOGY

2.1. THE BASIC ELEMENTS: THE SCRIPTURES AND YAHWEH

Judaism is based on the Jewish scripture (the Tanakh or the Masoretic Text), which is formed of the writings of Moses, the writings of the prophets, the psalmists and other canonized scriptures. "Tanakh" is a Jewish acronym consisting of the initials of its main subdivisions: *Torah* ("T," which means "Teachings"), *Nevi'im* ("N," which means "Prophets"), and *Ketuvim* ("K," which means "Writings") – TaNaKh. The Tanakh is complemented by prophetic works such as the Mishnah and the Gemara, which together form the Talmud. Parts of the Tanakh are incorporated in various forms in the Christian scripture. [7]

Judaism is monotheistic. God is unique, invisible, non-physical, non-corporal and eternal. The Jewish scriptures refer to the Supreme Being in many ways: Yahweh (Yahve, Iahve), Elohim, Adonai, Shekhinah or Zebaot. The first name is the most frequently used. [8] "Yahweh" is the personal name of the one and true god, who spoke with Abraham and Moses, freed the people of Israel from Egypt, gave the Ten Commandments and revealed himself countless times. The most common and simplest description of Yahweh enumerates his features of omnipotence (absolute power), omniscience (absolute knowledge) and omnibenevolence (absolute goodness). [9] The three features have been partially adopted by Christianity, in the sense that the feature of omnibenevolence was replaced with that of omnipresence (God is present everywhere and is part of all that exists).

At the heart of the Jewish creed sits the idea that of all the nations of the world Israel was chosen by Yahweh to receive spiritual and material gifts.

Judaism is the one true form of worship received by Moses from Yahweh; Palestine is the strip of land that the Israelites managed to conquer with the help of Yahweh; the heart of Palestine is the holy city of Jerusalem; inside Jerusalem lies Solomon's Temple, where priests brought animal sacrifices honoring Yahweh; and finally, inside the Temple lies the Ark of the Covenant, the tangible proof that the Hebrew people have a special destiny. Accordingly, the fate of the Jewish people, Palestine, Jerusalem, Solomon's Temple and the Ark of the Covenant are key objects of Judaism and Jewish eschatology. All these had a major role in Jewish history and they will also have an important role in mankind's evolution toward the end of the world.

2.2. THE CENTRAL POINT OF JEWISH ESCHATOLOGY: THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

The entire Jewish eschatology revolves around a single future event: the coming of the Messiah. [10] The term "messiah" (Romanized Hebrew: *mashiaḥ*) has a wide range of meanings. The Jewish scriptures used the term for describing kings and priests that were anointed with oil according to Exodus 30:22-25. "Messiah" literally means "to be covered with oil, anointed." From an eschatological point of view the Messiah will be a future Jewish king who will rule the entire world at the end of times. [11]

The Messiah as an eschatological concept was born in Judaism during the Egyptian captivity and the prophetic advent of Moses. Moses prophesied the coming of the Messiah but, by freeing and leading the Israelites in Canaan, he involuntarily became a raw model and a precursor of the Messiah. Due to Moses the Israelites came to envision the Messiah as a leader that rises from among the people, seizes the political power, frees Israel from any foreign domination and brings it to the height of prosperity.

Another messianic model rose during the Babylonian captivity: Cyrus the Great, the king of Persia. After he conquered the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC, Cyrus freed the Jews, allowed them to return to Canaan and rebuilt Solomon's Temple, previously destroyed by the Babylonians (Ezra 1:1-4, 2, 4-5; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Daniel 9:1-2). Cyrus was a non-Jew. But through his actions he gained a messianic aura and strengthened the messianic concept started by Moses (Isaiah 45).

The moment of the coming of the Messiah is a divine secret (Daniel 12:9) and any attempt to determine it is a sin. [12] However, every time they passed through dark and troubled times the Jewish people have turned their hopes and expectations toward the promised savior. During the Roman domination there was an inflation of individuals eager to assume the role of the Messiah. Beside the well-known Jesus Christ, the *status quo* was also challenged by the Samaritan prophet, Theudas, Judas of Galilee [13] or the Egyptian prophet. The dissolution of the Hebrew people and the destruction of the Holy Temple were due to messianic manifestations as well. In 66 AD Menahem led a rebellion that expelled the Roman domination from Jerusalem. Four years later General Titus launched the counteroffensive. The Judean resistance was quickly defeated and, in order to properly punish the rebels, the Romans set fire to most of the city, including the Second Temple. [14] Later, in 132 AD, the uprising of Simon bar Kokhba (which means "Son of the Stars" in Aramaic) led to the removal of the Romans from Jerusalem for three years. In retaliation, the Romans under Hadrian slaughtered over half a million insurgents, renamed the province "Palestine" (from *Philistia* , the traditional enemy of the Israelites), destroyed the Jewish objects of worship, executed the priests, banned the Jews from entering Jerusalem and scattered them within the territory of the empire. [15]

At the moment the Judaic image of the Messiah contains the divine inspiration of Moses, the military skills of David and Cyrus and the political and economic ingenuity of Solomon. Most of the details referring to the Messiah, what he will do and what he will achieve during his reign, are found in the Tanakh, Isaiah and other prophets: he will become an example for the entire world (Isaiah 2:4); he will be a descendant of King David (Isaiah 11:2) and King Solomon (1 Chronicles 22:8-10); all the Israelites will come back to their homeland (Isaiah 11:12); death, famine and disease will be eradicated (Isaiah 25:8); all dead people will be resurrected (Isaiah 26:19); the Messiah will make the Jews his priests and they will spiritually guide all the people (Zechariah 8:23); the entire world will honor Yahweh (Isaiah 2:17); the ruined cities of Israel will be rebuilt (Ezekiel 16:55); the Holy Temple will be rebuilt and animal sacrifices will be resumed (Ezekiel 40); or the Messiah will turn barren lands into abundant and prosperous ones (Ezekiel 36:29-30).

2.3. THE AFTERLIFE AND THE TRANSMIGRATION OF

SOULS

The afterlife in Judaism refers both to the life after death and the Messianic Age – as the reign of the Messiah is called. In his "13 principles of faith" Maimonides says that the souls of the dead have a spiritual existence in the Garden of Eden or the Purgatory until the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the bodies. The Messianic Age will merge the spiritual and material realms and people will be able to communicate with Yahweh, but it is not clear what category of people will be resurrected and what will happen with the souls of those who are not resurrected. A partial answer is offered by Kabbalah, which teaches about the transmigration of souls – a kind of reincarnation that is neither automatic nor a punishment for sin as it is depicted in some Eastern ideologies. It rather focuses on the individual process of atonement. Each Jewish soul is reincarnated until it fulfills all the moral principles indicated in the Torah. [16] Likewise, the souls of the righteous non-Jews can be assisted during the cycle in order to fulfill the Seven Laws of Noah. [17] The cycles of the soul represent an expression of divine compassion, a new chance of redemption and a heavenly agreement with each individual soul for a new descent.

Although the human soul is immortal and survives the physical death of the body, Judaism focuses on the importance of the actual earthly life, and not on a future reward. According to the medieval scholar Isaac Luria, at the beginning of Creation the emanations of Yahweh invaded all possible worlds, until they reached an end in our physical world as divine "sparks." Divine revelations in the form of scriptures are meant to guide each spark (human soul) to return to its original source (Yahweh) for reunification. When all the sparks will be close enough to Yahweh the Messianic Age will begin. Thus, Jewish theology grants cosmic meaning and importance to each individual life, because every single one of us has tasks that only he can accomplish. The eschatological utopia will take place only in the material world, the lowest one, because the material realm is at the margin of Creation and the Messianic Age represents the fulfillment of the purpose of Creation in the material world. [18]

3. CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY

3.1. THE BASIC ELEMENTS: THE BIBLE AND THE TRINITY

Christianity came into existence in the 1st century AD in the Roman province of Palestine through the teachings and actions of Jesus Christ. Given the fact that Christ and the first Christians were ethnic Jews, Christianity was initially believed to be a radical branch of Judaism. Besides, a good part of Judaism was absorbed by Christianity, and in this way the two became twin religions. The Torah became a part of the Bible and subsequently Christians became spiritual successors of Abraham.

The Bible is the holy book that lies at the basis of Christian doctrine. The Bible became very much the image of the book it is today in 363 AD at Laodicea, Phrygia. On that occasion the synod sorted all the available religious texts into two categories: the canonical texts, which were accepted by the church and therefore must be obeyed, and the apocryphal texts, which were rejected and must be ignored. All the writings declared canonical were gathered in a single book generically called the "Bible" (Romanized Greek: *biblos* – "book"), the "Word of God" or the "Holy Scripture."

The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is largely composed of Jewish scriptures (the Tanakh and the Masoretic Text), while the New Testament contains four accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (the gospels), a narrative account of the lives and works of the apostles of Jesus (Acts of the Apostles), other writings of the apostles (the epistles), and a prophetic writing (Revelation). The relation between the two testaments is one of completion and subordination. Given the fact that Christ came as the Messiah, his teachings are above all the other commands and annuls all the contrary precepts of the Mosaic Law. The relation between the Old and the New Testament is a symbol of the superseding of Judaism by Christianity in the position of a New Israel. The term "testament" reflects God's covenant with the Jewish people through Moses in the Old Testament and the covenant perfected by Jesus Christ with the Christian Church in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ is the key figure of the Bible. The Old Testament announces his coming, [19] while the New Testament reveals his life and teachings.

Occasionally, Jesus Christ is also called the “Son of God,” the “Messiah,” the “Savior” or the “Lord.” “Jesus” is a Jewish first name which has the meaning of “Savior” or “the Lord who saves” (Matthew 1:21). On the other hand, “Christ” comes from the Greek word *Christós* (Romanized Greek), the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” Due to the fact that the texts of the New Testament were mainly written in Greek, [20] instead of “Jesus the Messiah” Christians say “Jesus Christ.” Also, the name “Christ” is the root of the words “Christian,” which means “the one who believes in Christ’s teachings,” and “Christianity,” which means the totality of denominations that base their doctrines on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Similarly to Judaism and Islam, Christian dogma describes the Supreme Being with the aid of three attributes: omnipotence (he can do everything), omnipresence (he is present everywhere and is part of all that exists) and omniscience (he knows everything). Nevertheless, Christianity is a monotheistic religion, but not absolutely. Jesus Christ is concurrently the messenger of God and God. God incarnated himself in the person of Jesus Christ, led a life without sin, was crucified for the redemption of the world, died and was buried, he resurrected after three days, ascended to Heaven and “seated at the right hand of the Father” with the promise of coming to earth for the second time. Christians pray to Jesus, worship Jesus and use his teachings because this is believed to be the path to salvation.

The belief in Jesus as the Son of God and God alike developed in the modern formula of the Trinity (Latin: *trinitas* – “triad”). God is a single entity, a oneness, unique in his nature, but threefold in his being. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit form the Holy Trinity. [21] This image of God was officially established at the ecumenical councils of Nicaea (325 AD) and Constantinople (381 AD), and ever since it has remained virtually unchanged. [22]

3.2. THE CENTRAL POINT OF CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY: THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

Most of the Christian doctrine was conceived during the dark times of the Roman persecution and the Middle Ages. Therefore, the dominant

> Christian point of view depicts a human order deeply and hopelessly wrong, decadent, beyond human powers of correction.

According to the Book of Genesis, the current order was born out of sin. When Adam and Eve, the primordial people, bit the fruit of knowledge and disobeyed God's commandment, they committed a sin and they were banished from Paradise to the earth. Ever since, human life is a ceaseless conflict between good and evil and the world as a whole decays and heads toward self-destruction. But God, because he loves his creation, designed a plan for saving mankind. The first step in this direction was made through Abraham, Moses and the naming of the Hebrews as the chosen people. The second step was the First Coming of Christ and the establishment of the Church. The third step will be made in the future through the Second Coming of Christ. And the fourth and final major step is achieved with the total destruction and reconstruction of humanity.

The event of the Second Coming of Christ is also called "Parousia" (Romanized Greek: *Parusia*) or "Advent" (Latin: *Adventus*); both words mean "coming" or (visible) "presence." Parousia does not bring the total destruction of the world, but its radical change. Jesus will descend from heaven to put an end to the current human order and to start a new world order called the "Millennium." In the gospels Jesus makes no distinction between his Second Coming and the end of the world, referring to both by the phrase "the end times." Hence, Christians believe that the end of the world and Parousia are one and the same thing. However, according to the Book of Revelation the end of the world is a long-lasting process that consists of several sub-events: it starts with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, continues with the victory over the Beast (Revelation 19), the victory over the Dragon, the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom under the rule of Christ and the binding of the Dragon, the passing of the 1,000 years and the unleashing of the Dragon to deceive the nations to turn against God at the Battle of Armageddon, the Last Judgment (Revelation 20), and finally the replacement of the old world with the new heaven and the new earth for eternity (Revelation 21).

Finally, as in Judaism, the moment of the end is a divine secret and any attempt to determine it is absolutely reprobated: "But of that day and hour

knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only" (Matthew 24:36). On the other hand, the Bible states that Jesus Christ will return in the same place, Jerusalem, and in the same manner as he ascended to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

3.3. THE SIGNS OF THE END

The Revelation of John, or the Apocalypse of John, is the last and the only entirely prophetic book of the New Testament. Its main theme is the end of the world. Revelation is believed to have been written towards the end of the 1st century, when Christianity was heavily persecuted by Roman authorities. The scribe of the book is traditionally identified with John the Apostle, while its author is Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:11, 17-18).

The word "apocalypse" comes from the (Romanized) Greek *apokalypsis* (*apo* – "far"; *kalyptein* – "revelation"), usually translated as "discovery" or "revelation." [23] Thus, the name of the final biblical book denotes its main theme and the purpose of its writing: the mystical description of the future (Revelation 1:1). But in modern culture the word "apocalypse" is synonymous with "catastrophe" or with the end of the world. This is due to the fact that, in addition to the book from the end of the Bible, the word "apocalypse" is also used to designate the period of time within which the events described in the Book of Revelation take place. Instead of "The end is coming!," people often say "The apocalypse is coming!," "Judgment Day is at hand!" or "Armageddon approaches!."

The events and entities which precede the end of the world are frequently called "signs of the end" or "signs of the times." The signs of the end are described both in the Book of Revelation and in other books of the New Testament. The purpose of the signs of the times is to remind mankind of Parousia. The prophetic texts are dominated by a pessimistic tone, mainly speaking about pain, sufferings, immorality, famine, death, wars or catastrophes. Hence, the phrase "signs of the times" has the meaning of abnormal, negative, evil or catastrophic.

The prophetic texts refer to a multitude of events, entities and actions, which are mentioned either generically (such as wars) or explicitly (such as the Antichrist). In the light of the role they have in the overall process, the

apocalyptic entities and events have a greater or lesser importance. Eschatological research has always focused upon the following major earthly signs: the Antichrist (Revelation 13), Babylon the Great (Revelation 17-18) and the Millennium (Revelation 20).

3.3.1. The Antichrist

According to the dominant Christian view, toward the end of time mankind will undergo a process of unprecedented decadence, which will culminate with the rise of the Antichrist, the supreme tyrant. Sin will be so strongly rooted in human society that divine intervention – the Second Coming of Christ – will be necessary for the reestablishment of order and the salvation of the world from obliteration.

The Antichrist is a fascinating entity. His tremendous power, his dreadful darkness and the major role he will have in history have inflamed the imagination of the theologians and fueled endless speculations. The Antichrist is by far the most studied apocalyptic entity because his emergence precedes the Second Coming of Christ, his fate is to be defeated by Christ, and the Book of Revelation reveals the number 666 as a clue for his identification (Revelation 13:18).

The Antichrist is the creation (the child) of Lucifer (2 Thessalonians 2:9), the fallen archangel who rebelled against God at the beginning of time. The purpose of the Antichrist is to deny God's authority and existence, to convince mankind to embrace sin and to become the only divine and mundane authority. While Jesus Christ won the world through love and free will, the Antichrist will subdue it through constraint and fear (Revelation 13:15-16). God the Father sent God the Son to save the world through sacrifice and truth, Lucifer will send the Antichrist to destroy the world through selfishness and deceit (John 8:44-45). And while Christ came to represent God, the Antichrist will represent himself (John 5:43).

The biblical texts use the terms "antichrists" and "antichrist" (or "Antichrist," with capital letter). When it is used in the singular, the word "antichrist" (1 John 2:18-22) designates a unique entity described in detail in Revelation 13. The biblical texts and the theological works also name Lucifer's offspring the "Son of Perdition," the "Deceiver," the "Man of Sin" or the "Beast"

(Revelation 11:7; 13:1). All the alternate names and descriptions reveal the antagonistic relationship between the Antichrist and Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Instead, when it is used in the plural form, “antichrists” is a generic name for all who, as the real Antichrist, negatively influence the course of history by using military and political power.

It is believed that the Antichrist will imitate Christ and consequently he will be a man with a global influence. But throughout history the term “antichrist” was also applied to systems of ideas, political and religious beliefs, countries or organizations. Christian tradition says that the Antichrist will disguise himself as the Messiah expected by the Jews. The Jewish messiah is destined to establish the Messianic Age (no one knows how), to lead the world and to promote Judaism. But Judaism does not recognize Christ as the Son of God. Hence, a world leader who denies Christ’s divinity is the perfect image of the Christian Antichrist (1 John 2:22). Interestingly, medieval Jewish eschatology speaks about Armilus, a false king who torments the Jewish people at the end of times and he is killed by the Messiah. [24] In *Sefer Zerubbabel* (the “Apocalypse of Zerubbabel”), a 7th-century apocryphal text, Armilus is presented as an offspring of Satan and a virgin. He was supposed to be killed by the Messiah in a final battle in 1058 AD, after which the Messianic Age was going to be established. [25]

The advent of the Antichrist is directly related to the apocalyptic signs of the apostasy and the great tribulation. The first, the apostasy (Latin: *apostasia* – “desertion”), means “abandonment of faith” and refers to an unparalleled period of moral degradation characterized by indifference toward religious precepts, selfishness, excess of food and drinking, the perpetuation of injustice and intemperance, idolatry or any other sinful practices. It is not clear whether the apostasy is a product of the Antichrist’s actions or it is established beforehand, preparing in fact his advent (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Because it has no spatial-temporal reference, the image of the apostasy has been often used as a propagandistic tool. At the time of the Great Schism, the Orthodox Church saw the apostasy in the Catholic Church, and vice versa. The Protestants of the Reformation saw the apostasy in Catholicism and popery, while the Catholics perceived the apostasy in the Reformation and Protestantism. Beginning with the 17th century the apostasy has been seen in the propagation of atheism and the emancipation of science from the tutelage

of religion. Nowadays priests and pastors curse the world for the so-called spiritual ruination brought by the economic prosperity (Matthew 24:37-39), while the fanatical sects proclaim the apostasy of the outside world in order to emphasize their own holiness. But, realistically speaking, there has always been a religious effervescence, with people who ceased to believe and people who began to believe.

The great tribulation refers to a temporal frame within which mankind will experience the hardest conditions of existence: “for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21). The opinions regarding the great tribulation varied over time. In the first four centuries it was believed to refer to the Roman persecutions. In the 16th century Protestants identified the apostasy with the corrupt doctrines of Catholicism and the great tribulation with the thousand-year persecution of those who had stood against the papal tyranny. And at the time of the Counter-Reformation it was established that the great tribulation is the consequence of the apostasy; it designates the Antichrist’s future reign, right before the Second Coming, within which people’s faith will be tested to the limit.

3.3.2. Babylon the Great

Babylon the Great, or the Whore of Babylon, is an allegorical figure of evil mentioned in chapters 17 and 18 of the Book of Revelation. Babylon the Great stirs the interest of the exegetes because it is in close relationship with the Antichrist (the beast from the sea) and it is one of the apocalyptic entities most clearly depicted. First, Babylon the Great refers to a city, a kingdom, or both; not only is Babylon the Great called the “great city” in Revelation 14 and 18, but there are also many textual similarities between the apocalyptic Babylon and the historical Babylon from the Old Testament (Isaiah 13:19; 21:9 or Jeremiah 25:12-17). Second, Babylon the Great will have a global influence: “that hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Revelation 14:8). And third, Revelation offers a geographic indication regarding Babylon the Great: “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth” (Revelation 17:9).

The image of the apocalyptic Babylon has been assigned to several cities and

kingdoms throughout history, on more or less religious grounds, but the best-known examples are Rome and Jerusalem.

In the early centuries Christians believed that the apocalyptic prophecies were being fulfilled in their own times. Accordingly, the apocalyptic Babylon was seen as a symbol for pagan Rome or the Roman Empire. Before the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, Rome had subdued the nations of Europe and Asia with brutality, paganism and greed, sending thousands of people to death. As it is shown in Revelation, it was an absurdly violent entity, drunk with the blood of the martyrs. [26] The city of Rome, at least in the flourishing period of the empire, was stretched over seven hills (mountains). It was even known as the "city of the seven hills," while Peter the Apostle names it "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13). First-century Rome may also fulfill the role of the apocalyptic Whore due to the actions taken against the chosen people: occupying Palestine, enslaving the Jewish people, uprooting the Jewish nation and religion, destroying Jerusalem and the Holy Temple in the year 70 and scattering the Jews after suppressing the last revolt in 132 AD. [27]

But Babylon the Great can also stand as a symbol for Jerusalem. A large number of prophecies from the Old Testament describe Jerusalem as a spiritual whore because it killed the prophets of God (Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1-11; Ezekiel 16:1-43; 23 or Isaiah 1:21: "How is the faithful city become a harlot! she that was full of justice! righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers"). In the New Testament Jesus and the apostles rebuke the people of Israel for the same reason: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her!" (Matthew 23:34-37). Moreover, the Jews crucified Jesus Christ and persecuted the first Christians – aspects that seem mentioned by John in Revelation 11:8: "And their dead bodies [lie] in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (Revelation 11:8). Just like Rome, the city of Jerusalem is also situated on seven hills. [28] And, while Rome was seen by the Romans as the material center of the world, Jerusalem has been seen by Jews as the spiritual center. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple in the year 70 seems to be symbolically depicted through the collapse of the Babylon from Revelation 18. Jerusalem is like an infidel bride that, despite the fact that she was divorced and thrown away for her villainy, continues to falsely pretend that she is the queen of the spiritual dimension.

The earthly Jerusalem, identified with the Whore of Babylon, represents the opposite of the new heavenly Jerusalem, which is the Christian Church or the Bride of Christ from Revelation 21:2.

In the 16th century Protestants identified again the Whore of Babylon with Rome, but this time for being the center of the Papacy and the Catholic Church. Besides the well-known argument of the "seven hills," Catholicism was seen as the religion which corrupted the nations through evil practices such as the veneration of saints, relics and icons (idolatry and apostasy according to Revelation 17:2; 18:3 and 19:2). The "drunkenness" caused by the "blood of the martyrs and saints" from Revelation 17:6 was seen as a reference to Inquisition, crusades, killings and atrocities falsely made in the name of God. And the global influence of Babylon the Great from Revelation 17:18 and 18:3, 11-13 was linked to the influence of Catholicism over Western Europe for more than a thousand years.

3.3.3. The Millennium

Millenarism, millennialism, millenarianism (Latin: *mille anno* – "a thousand years") or chiliasm (Romanized Greek: *chilia etē* – "a thousand years") is the belief that between the Second Coming and Final Judgment there will be a golden age of 1,000 years (the Millennium) within which Christ will reign over all the earth. The prospect of a future Millennium is repeatedly expressed in Revelation 20: "and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished" (Revelation 20:4-5). [29]

Millenarism is not an exclusively Christian concept. It refers to any social, political or religious belief that promotes a fundamental and almost instantaneous transformation of society for the better, without a necessary limitation in time. In this case, the Christian Millennium is the opposite of the periods of evil and suffering; inside this temporal frame the sinners and the saints will be clearly delimited, with punishment for the first ones and rewards for the latter. Christian millenarist views are divided into three large categories: premillenarism, postmillenarism and amillenarism.

Premillenarism says that the return of Christ will be preceded by certain signs such as preaching the gospel to all nations, the apostasy, wars, famine or the

advent of the Antichrist. Likewise, the Second Coming precedes the Millennium, while Parousia and Final Judgment are two distinct events, separated by the length of the 1,000 years. The return of the Lord will be followed by a period of peace and prosperity just before the end of the world, a period in which Christ will reign physically, directly and personally. The Kingdom of God is established *ex abrupto* , through a revolutionary process that interrupts the chain of natural and historical causalities. The transformation is the exclusive outcome of divine intervention and human actions have no influence over it. The new era will bring unprecedented prosperity in human society and harmony in nature to such a degree that the desert will flourish as a rose and wild beasts will be tamed. Evil will be quenched through the power and goodness of Christ and believers will be revived in glorified bodies. But, despite these ideal conditions, some people will not be satisfied and will launch one final rebellion against God and his adherents. The final manifestation of evil will be suppressed by Christ and then Final Judgment will begin.

Postmillenarism depicts the Second Coming as posterior to the Millennium, followed immediately by Judgment Day. The reign of Christ (during the Millennium) will be spiritual through the Church. Thus, the Kingdom of God will be established as the world converts to Christianity and an environment of general peace and prosperity emerges. The Kingdom of God is progressively established, through practical human means such as religious awakenings or social reforms. People have the possibility to work on their own destiny and on the course of mankind. This conception assumes a linear evolution and a historical continuity between what was before and what will be after the Second Coming. The return of Christ is conditioned by the consummation of certain earthly events and the progress of humanity through its own powers toward a utopian level of existence. The Millennium is established, therefore, after (*post-*) this collective human effort, so that the transition from the old order to the new one will take place almost insensibly. Evil will not be eliminated, but its influence will be significantly diminished. All mankind’s problems will be solved through a healthy attitude of the individuals toward society, nature and God. The Millennium will end with Parousia, Armageddon, the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment.

Throughout history dozens of groups have tried to implement their vision of

the millenary life inside their communities. Premillenarism involves a risk of sectarian tendency. When the members of a group believe that they are divine instruments they isolate themselves from the decayed society and interpret in a paranoid manner any opposition. The negative attitude toward society can take extreme defensive forms, such as collective suicide, or offensive, such as the purification of the world through mass killings. By contrast, the postmillenarist groups adopt a positive attitude toward society and offer a model of living expressed through a strictly followed set of rules, charitable activities or non-aggressive proselytism. Nevertheless, postmillenarist groups tend to grant to visionary leaders the status of prophet at the risk of a dictatorship. In this context the role of the prophet signifies rather the ability to articulate certain biblical interpretations, and not necessarily divine revelations.

Finally, amillenarism denies the existence of a future Millennium. It is considered to be either a metaphor of the evolution of the Church or an imitation of the Jewish Messianic Age. The reign of Christ manifests itself through the Church, but evil and good will coexist until Parousia, when the dead will be revived and Final Judgment will begin.

3.4. THE LIFE AFTER DEATH AND THE LIFE AFTER THE END

The Kingdom of God refers to both Heaven (Paradise), the place where people go after death, and the Church, the community of believers that accedes to Christ’s teachings.

The Church is not the ecclesiastical institution organized in ranks and material constructions (namely the church), but the group of people who adopted the Christian principles and ideas. The Church was established by Jesus Christ and ever since it has evolved in accordance with the progressive revelation of God. If the existence of a future Millennium is accepted, then the Kingdom of God goes through three stages:

(1) The temporal stage, delimited by the First and the Second Coming;

(2) The intermediary stage, during the Millennium;

(3) The eternal stage, which starts after the Last Judgment, the revealing of the new earth and the new heaven and it will last forever.

From the Ascension until Parousia Christians live inside the temporal stage of the Kingdom of God, that is the Church. In the eternal stage, when the current world will be replaced with the new heaven and the new earth, the Church and the Kingdom of God will be one and the same with Paradise (Eden, Heaven). Upon the revealing of the new earth and the new heaven the second resurrection will operate (the first one takes place at Parousia) and humans will pass to the asexual non-corporeal state of existence of the angels: “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:30).

4. ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY

4.1. THE BASIC ELEMENTS: THE QURAN AND ALLAH

The word “Islam” comes from the (Romanized) Arabic word *salama* (“to obey”), which is also the root for the word “Muslim,” which means “the one who received Islam.” Muslims refer to Jews, Christians and themselves as the “people of the book” due to the fact that the three religions are based on certain texts of divine origin. The sacred book of Islam is the Quran (Romanized Arabic: *Al-Qur’ān* – which means “reading” or “reciting”), composed of 114 *suras* (a sort of chapters). The Quran contains the revelations given by Allah through Gabriel the Archangel in the year 610 to Muhammad in the cities of Mecca and Medina directly into Arabic.

According to Muslims, Islam is a faith that was gradually revealed since the dawn of time through prophets. The Quran names 25 prophets (their number is above 1,000 according to tradition), including Adam (the first man), Noah, Abraham, Moses, King David, Jesus and Muhammad; the latter is the most significant. [30] Muhammad is considered to be the direct descendant of Abraham through Ishmael, born of the handmaiden Hagar.

Islam admits the divine inspiration of both the Jewish and Christian scriptures and the major religious roles of Moses and Jesus Christ. Yet, the initial sacred texts are believed to have been wrongly interpreted and distorted by believers

(both accidentally and intentionally). The Quran thus represents the revision of the mistakes made by the others, the unaltered "Last Testament" revealed through the final prophet. Muhammad is the "Seal of the Prophets," the last in a long series, while Islam is the final and perfect monotheistic faith (Quran 5:3). The original Arabic text of the Quran is considered pure and holy to the last letter. Therefore, any translation is an interpretation of the Quran because only the original Arabic text is divine scripture. [31] Moreover, the Quran is complemented by *hadiths* , conversations and speeches of Muhammad that help scholars interpret and apply the quranic precepts.

Allah (the Arab word for "God") is the supreme deity, is unique, is not associated in a Holy Trinity and does not have a Son (Quran 112:1). [32] Yahweh and God the Father are one and the same with Allah, but the Trinity is seen as a form of polytheism (Quran 3:59). The Holy Spirit, a very abstract concept, is identified with Gabriel the Archangel. Instead, Jesus – known in Islam by the name of "Isa" – is considered to be a prophet superior to his predecessors, but not part of divinity. He was neither crucified nor resurrected, but raised by Allah to Heaven (Quran 4:155-158). [33]

4.2. THE CENTRAL POINT OF ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY: JUDGMENT DAY

Islam eschatology copies to a great extent Christian eschatology, but the key difference between the two consists in the importance of the events. Christians see Christ as the central element of their religion and, accordingly, they confer a leading role to his Second Coming. Muslims assert the return of Christ, but, because he was only an important prophet, his return has a secondary importance in the overall scenario of the end. While the central point of Christian eschatology is the Second Coming, Islamic eschatology revolves around Judgment Day.

The Quran uses 19 different names to designate Judgment Day or the end of the world: the Day of Judgment, the Day of Gathering, the Day of Resurrection or the Day of Reckoning. Islam teaches about the resurrection of the dead, the fulfillment of a divine plan for the world and the immortality of the human soul. At Judgment the righteous will be rewarded with the pleasures of Heaven, while the wicked will be punished in Hell. About a third

of the Quran is occupied by eschatological beliefs, complemented by many *hadiths* .

Islamic eschatology speaks about the last days as a period of trial, when people will experience anarchy and chaos in order to prove their love for Allah. There are 10 signs that have to happen before the coming of the end: smoke for 40 days, the rise of *al-Dajjal* , the Beast (that will rise from earth and will be gigantic), the Sun rising in the west, the descent of Jesus, Gog and Magog, and three massive landslides: one in the east, one in the west and another in Arabia, at the end of which a fire will come out from the direction of Yemen that will cast out the remaining people toward the final settlement (Sahih Muslim 6931). As in the other two Abrahamic religions, the time of the end is a secret kept by Allah and any attempt to find it is a blasphemy (Quran 33:63; Sahih Al-Bukhari 1:47).

4.3. THE SIGNS OF THE END

4.3.1. *Al-Dajjal* (the Antichrist)

Muslims expect the advent of the Antichrist as well, whom they name the "Great Deceiver" or the "Impostor Messiah" (Romanized Arabic: *Al-Masikh al-Dajjal*). The (Romanized) Arabic word *dajjal* means "to deceive" and it is used in religious contexts to designate false prophets or messiahs. Muhammad said that there will be around 30 *dajjals* ("antichrists") (Sahih Al-Bukhari 9:237). *Al-Masikh al-Dajjal* , written with definite article and capital letter, will be the last and most powerful of antichrists. He will appear before Judgment Day, will defy Allah and will make a deceiving interpretation of the scriptures. He will speak beautifully and will fool the world to follow his teachings, saying that Hell is Heaven and Heaven is Hell (Sahih Al-Bukhari 4:554). He will pretend to be the Jewish messiah and the returned Jesus Christ, but the real Jesus will descend from heaven and will kill him (Sahih Muslim 7023).

Al-Dajjal is believed to appear somewhere between Syria and Iraq, approximately at the same time with the return of Isa (Jesus) on the clouds of heaven and the coming of the Mahdi. *Al-Dajjal* will travel the entire world preaching his false teachings, but Allah will not let him enter Mecca and

Medina (Sahih Al-Bukhari 3:105). The *hadiths* say that he will have his right eye damaged (or blind), curly hair, (Sahih Al-Bukhari 4:649), something wrong with his legs and written on his forehead the word “disbeliever” (Romanized Arabic: *Kafir*) (Sahih Muslim 7008). He will initially pretend that he is a prophet sent by Allah, but when he will gain enough power and a large number of adherents he will claim that he is divinity. He will have with him the illusion of a hellfire and a paradise. The people who will refuse him will be forced to enter this hellfire; but practically it will be cold and safe. He will gather the army of the deceived and he will lead them in war against Jesus, who will be accompanied by the army of the righteous.

The advent of *al-Dajjal* will be preceded by the following signs: the spread of disbelief and its appreciation as a virtue, the spread of dishonesty, the abandonment of faith for material goods, the legitimization of bribery and usury, the spread of stupidity and the taking of power by fools to the detriment of the wise, the spread of corruption especially within leaders, wars and riots that will result in shedding of innocent blood, the spread of hypocrisy, adultery will become an uncontrollable social phenomenon and eventually will be accepted, women will dress as men and men like women, liars and cheaters will be respected, there will be an acute famine at the moment of his advent. [34]

It is not clear where the power of *al-Dajjal* comes from, if he is or not a creation of the devil (Satan). In Islam Satan is the parent of demons and he was made by Allah from smokeless fire. But when Allah created Adam, Satan refused to prostrate to him because he was made of clay. Due to this act of rebellion, Allah expelled Satan from Eden, but the latter asked the Creator for an adjournment, an extension of his life until Judgment Day, when he will be destroyed. [35]

4.3.2. Jesus Christ and the Mahdi

Unlike Christian and Jewish eschatologies, which are populated by a single messianic figure in the person of Jesus Christ and the Messiah, in the Islamic one there are two messianic figures with similar roles: Isa (Jesus, the son of Mary) and the Mahdi.

The first, Isa, was an important prophet, but his mission and teachings only

foreshadowed the true teachings received by Muhammad. At a moment known only by Allah Isa will return in a physical and visible way, concurrently with the advent of the eschatological entity the Mahdi and shortly after the rise of *al-Dajjal* . Jesus will descend on earth from the clouds of heaven, will guide the righteous through the power of Allah, will kill *al-Dajjal* , put an end to all wars and will establish an era of peace and prosperity. Jesus will perform the role of the Messiah, but only as an apostle of Allah.

The second, the Mahdi (or *Mehdi* – the "Guided One") is a reinvention of the Jewish Messiah. The Mahdi is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran and in the Sunni *hadiths* such as the famous Sahih Al-Bukhari; these mention only the Second Coming of Jesus. Hence, the concept of the Mahdi is largely rejected by Sunni Muslims on the ground that it is a political invention, [36] bu supported by Shia Muslims who believe it refers to a future Islamic leader. The Mahdi will be the savior of Islam and he will rise shortly before Judgment Day. He will free the world of error, injustice and oppression together with Jesus. He will be a direct descendant of Muhammad on the genealogical line of Fatimah (the prophet's daughter), his name will be "Muhammad" like the great prophet, and his father's name will be "Abdullah" (which means "Allah's servant") (Sunan Abi Dawud 4279-4290 – Kitab al-Mahdi). He will be simple and handsome, will restore the original faith, will fight for the cause of Islam in the world and he will win, will protect the Muslims from destruction, will fill the world with justice at a time when there will be oppression and corruption, and he will lead for seven, nine or 19 years. The signs that foreshadow the coming of the Mahdi are the following: the advent of the false triad of *al-Dajjal* , *Sufyani* and *Yamani* , the Arabs will gain their independence by chasing away the foreigners, the eruption of a great conflict in the land of Syria and Iraq until it will be destroyed, death and fear will affect the people of Iraq when a fire will appear in the sky and a redness will cover the country, the rise of a black flag, both a lunar and a solar eclipse in the same month of Ramadan, the rise of a star with a glowing tail from the east, the image of the Mahdi will appear on the Moon, the growth of the murders, the complete ruination of large cities and the polarization of wealth toward a few and the spread of famine toward the many. [37]

The Mahdi will come out in a year divisible by 2; he will announce his presence in the city of Mecca between the corner from Ka'ba and the place of Abraham and will urge the people to show him loyalty. Then he will go to Kufa. At the time of his coming *al-Dajjal* and *Sufyani* (one of the oppressors who works for *al-Dajjal* ; the correspondent of the "False Prophet" from Revelation 13:11-14) will gather an army against Muslims. The two forces will confront in a final battle (the Christian Armageddon) (Sunan Abi Dawud 4291-4350 – Kitab al-Malahim). During the battle, Isa will descend from heaven on the wings of two angels, east of Damascus, dressed in yellow clothes and with his head anointed. He will join the forces of the Mahdi and he will kill *al-Dajjal* . Isa will preach the Islamic teachings and all the people of the book (Christians and Jews) will believe in him. Therefore there will be a single religious community, Islam.

After the death of the Mahdi (the circumstances of his death are not clear), Jesus will take the role of supreme leader. This is the moment when a period of 40 years of peace and prosperity will begin, and not 1,000 years as it is said in Christian eschatology. During the four decades two ancient tribes, Gog and Magog, will spread and will create disorder on the face of the earth. But Jesus will pray to Allah, who will kill them by afflicting them with a sort of worm in their nape. In the end, Jesus will die after 40 years of leadership and he will be buried in Medina, close to Muhammad's grave. [38]

4.4. THE AFTERLIFE AND SALVATION

Allah is the most compassionate and merciful (Quran 1:1), but also the most just. Islam prescribes a literal Hell for those who disobey Allah and commit critical sins. Allah will make every person, Muslim or non-Muslim, responsible for his actions (Quran 74:38). At the end of times Israfil the Archangel will blow the horn and there will be a resurrection of the dead; Muhammad will be revived first. [39] All mankind will assembly in front of Allah for Judgment (Quran 64:9), the book of life will be opened and every person will be called to account for everything what he did and spoke during his lifetime (Quran 54:52-53). The Judgment consists of balancing between good deeds and sins. If a person has more good deeds than sins, then he will enter Paradise. If not, he will be sent to Hell (Quran 2:81-82). But there are sins that condemn a person to Hell no matter the amount of good deeds:

lying, dishonesty, corruption, ignoring Allah's revelation (Quran 9:63), denying the resurrection, refusal to feed the poor, self-delectation with riches and ostentation, economic exploitation of others and social oppression. The punishments in Hell include pain, very powerful torture (Quran 29:55; 43:48) or disgrace (Quran 16:27; 11:39).

Paradise, on the other hand, is as a place of welfare and happiness, and it is divided, like Hell, on levels. The highest levels are reserved to the most virtuous: the prophets, the martyrs, the ones who helped orphans and those who never told a lie (among many other categories mentioned in the Quran and *hadiths*). Paradise is sometimes described as an incredibly beautiful garden or park, with crystalline rivers and food of all sorts, in which the believers enjoy physical pleasures. Nevertheless, the greatest joy that Paradise offers is the divine grace and a close relation between humans and Allah (Quran 9:72). [40]

Chapter III. PATTERNS OF APOCALYPTIC MANIFESTATIONS

1. MESSIANISM

In the light of the concepts, structure and religious ideas promoted by the three great Abrahamic religions, the end of the world can be announced in two ways: messianically and prophetically. In addition to these, the end can be determined or announced from a secular (scientific) point of view through prediction. Together, when they refer to the end of the world, messianism, prophetism and predictionism are generically called "apocalyptic manifestations."

From the Abrahamic point of view, the proclamation of the Messiah or the assignation to an individual the title of messiah automatically involves the proclamation of the imminent end of the world. Jews expect the Messiah to bring the Messianic Age, Christians believe that Jesus Christ will bring the Millennium or Judgment Day, while Muslims believe that Isa will establish an era of peace of prosperity. In all cases, the Messiah can only be one (or two individuals in the case of the Shiite Islam). Hence, all the other false

messianic manifestations are generically called “messianisms.”

The belief in the advent of a savior with supernatural powers who dramatically alters the course of history is not an exclusive feature of the Abrahamic religions. Almost all religions state the existence of a superior being that must come in order to fulfill a divine and global mission. In Buddhism, Maitreya is an illuminated being that will reintroduce the pure *dharma* (the universal law of nature and the path to illumination) to the world. He will be a successor of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of the Buddhist religion, and he will reveal himself at a time of great trial, when the teachings of Buddhism will be about to be abandoned. [41]

In Hinduism, Kalki (which means the “Destroyer of Evil” or the “Annihilator of Ignorance”) is the tenth and the last Great Incarnation of Vishnu, the supreme god in the Vaishnavite tradition. Kalki will come to put an end to the present era of darkness and destruction dominated by the male demon Kali. Kalki is also perceived as a metaphor for the eternity of time, while the end of the world is seen as a depletion of an era and the start of a new one, in an endlessly repeating cycle. [42]

In Zoroastrianism (Mazdaism), the ancient religion of Persia, Saoshyant (which means the “Benefactor”) is the empowered messenger of Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity. Saoshyant will show himself at the end of times in order to fight with the forces of evil and defeat them. In the final battle the gods Airyman and Atar will lead a “river-like” army, but the righteous will not be touched. Ahura Mazda will triumph through his agent Saoshyant, who will resurrect the dead and clean their souls for being reunited with the divinity. Time will end and truth, justice and immortality will be forever. [43]

Each messianic manifestation is unique and can occur by appointment or self-appointment. In most cases the role of the Messiah is assumed by a single person of male gender. Messiahs have always been characterized by charisma, alleged supernatural powers and popularity among those without education. They use the altruistic message of salvation to feed their selfish need of being worshiped. Similar to political dictators, messiahs suffer from personality disorders such as sadism, schizoidism, paranoia, narcissism or anti-social behavior. Haunted by a traumatizing childhood, messiahs take revenge on the society that rejected them, made them feel small and

insignificant and caused them suffering. Accordingly, they inspire separation from the “degenerate” society, while at the same time depicting themselves as important people, divine messengers and spiritual saviors.

Messianic manifestations usually rise at times of great distress: disasters, wars, famine, pandemics or so-called apostasy. Frightened people become attracted to eccentric leaders and this is how apocalyptic expectations can bring remarkable powers to unremarkable people. Although they promote an egocentric doctrine that literally calls to intellectual and material slavery, messiahs easily gain the hearts and minds of others by cultivating fear or by satisfying certain expectations. They are skilled manipulators who pursue only their own interests. Their arguments never stimulate logic and reason, but instincts and emotions. They hide their real and undeclared personal greed behind religious propaganda. In public they take the image of victims, but in private they behave like tyrants. Some aspects related to their person can easily be perceived as miracles by their devotees, while the horrible sins they commit are conveniently absolved by their divine mission. In this way, messiahs permanently have an immaculate image.

Messiahs always challenge the established order, be it religious or political. Accordingly, they build their cult of personality in remote areas or behind closed doors, hiding from the hand of the authorities. But, due to the fact that they are based on lies and temporary euphoria, the messianic manifestations are short-lived. They usually end in bloodshed caused by a clash with the “decayed” society or mass suicide.

2. PROPHECY

Prophecy refers to the process of receiving information about the future through divine revelation (which is basically a miracle). The receptor of the prophecy is called “prophet”, and his role is to share the received knowledge with others. Divine revelation can occur inside the prophet’s being – through dreams or visions inspired by divinity; or it can occur outside the prophet’s being – when divinity reveals itself through extraordinary sensory occurrences (angels, signs in the environment or the embodiment of supernatural entities) that can be observed by other individuals, non-prophets,

as well.

A prophecy is revealed independently from the will of the individual and exclusively due to the divine will. Prophets are ordinary men who have no intention in seeing the future, they do not use methods to explore unknown dimensions and they do not search for signs in the environment. Prophets cannot choose the setting (the time and the place) in which they are going to experience revelations. They see the future because God wants this to happen; they are channels of communication between divinity and the world. In the Bible there are numerous examples of prophets and prophecies: Isaiah announces Christ's incarnation 700 years in advance (Isaiah 7:14); Daniel speaks about the fate of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek-Macedonian and Roman Empires (Daniel 2; 7-8; 9-12); and John experiences divine revelations whereupon he writes the Book of Revelation, which is a long line of prophecies.

Contrary to popular opinion, the so-called "gift of prophecy" (or the "gift of premonition" [44]) does not exist. A prophecy is not the result of a prophetic ability or a method of supernatural interrogation, but of an involuntary communication with God. Prophets do not have a gift (ability) to see the future, but only information about the future that were given to them by God. God is infinitely stronger than man, and therefore the communication between man and God depends solely on the will of the latter. The idea that it can be acquired through different methods or practices is rooted in the confusion between prophecy and prevision, and between divine revelation and divination respectively. If there is indeed a gift of prophecy, this means that divinity can be compelled to automatically respond with miracles when man performs a certain ritual, which is absurd.

Divination (Latin: *divinare* – "to foresee," "to be inspired by God") is that part of mysticism which refers to the attempt to achieve knowledge about the past, present or future by using a certain ritual or process. Divination has been practiced since ancient times and has constantly evolved. It aims to explain the environment when the rational means fail to do it. The diviner (or "seer") spends time and energy studying books of magic, reading signs in the environment or interrogating supernatural entities. He relies on the belief that there is a magical and unknown connection between the different layers of

the Universe, dimensions he can explore and from within which he can gather information about the real world. The act of divination is sometimes accompanied by the consumption of hallucinogenic substances or the use of instruments, such as the crystal globe or the pendulum – all meant to induce the individual in a sort of a trance, a state of semi-consciousness in which hallucinations blend with reality. Ancient people were obsessed with divination; the Romans, the Greeks or the Egyptians practiced scatomancy (reading the shape of the excrements), geomancy (reading the shape of the soil), hydromancy (reading the shape of the water), alomancy (reading the shape of the salt) or lampadomancy (reading the movements of the flame). [45] Of all the methods of divination, the best-known is astrology (reading the stars), which transcends the temporal, cultural and geographic barriers.

Divination has been a delicate issue in the Abrahamic religions. In some parts of the Old Testament the Israelites practiced it (Leviticus 16:8; Joshua 18:6; 1 Samuel 14:42), while in other parts divination is condemned (Leviticus 19:26, 31). Christianity theoretically rejected divination, but actually some methods were rejected, others were tolerated and others were even practiced.

Messiahs, false prophets and diviners manipulate people through truth distortions, filtering information, exaggeration of own virtues to the level of the miraculous, concealment of shameful past, inhibition of logic and reason to the stage of blind trust, and the setting of an environment of fear and stress. However, as Nephi Morris explains, any false ideological construction inevitably collapses to the test of time:

> *Time is the supreme test of a prophecy. He who undertakes to foretell events must know that Time in its merciless pursuit will find him out. Of all the pretenses of the false prophet, prophesying is the most hazardous. Religious impostors often display qualities of leadership in controlling the affairs of their followers. The more modest their pretenses, however, the more likely are they to escape detection and exposure. But when spiritual leaders assume to exercise the exalted function of prophecy, and have the courage to publish their prophecies, they place their reputations before the bar of the world, and as the weight of Time presses out the vintage of the centuries they must sink to a deserving oblivion or be exalted to a place in the skies. Time is a foe of Fraud, but*

the never-failing friend of Truth. [46]

Aware of this thing, some false prophets set the day of the end so far in time that at the moment of truth the oracle will be long dead; no one can verify if God offered information about future events until the designated time. Others prepare explanations in advance for their prophetic failure. And others rely on vague and uncertain prophecies, but scary enough to trigger around them feelings of vulnerability, insecurity, euphoria or expectation. Such prophets do not venture in naming exact dates, but they insist on the idea that "the end is near" or "the end is coming soon." This can mean tomorrow, next year, or even over a thousand years. In any case, the enduring followers never discredit the notion; they redefine and reorganize the doctrinal details and with a new confidence they start again waiting for the end.

The attempt to determine the future by using supernatural methods comes to offer man a false sense of security where scientific methods failed to provide the expected answers. The ultra-specialization of work and knowledge, so necessary to the progress of modern society, allowed mankind to rapidly climb toward heights of prosperity, but it left the individual vulnerable in the face of the miraculous. This is a risk we have to take and a price we have to pay for our evolution as a species. The ultra-specialization deprives the individual of the big picture: he may well have a PhD in chemistry, but at the same time he has no clue about philosophy; certificate of merit in physics, but clueless about the religious phenomenon; expert in literature, but without any idea about mathematics. And the lack of the big picture can trigger feelings of spiritual emptiness, depression, uselessness, which can ultimately push the person toward extremism.

3. PREDICTION

The end of the world has always been a religiously overcharged subject, inseparable from the divine will. An end of the world produced by the simple mechanics of the Universe, independent of divinity, took shape only at the end of the 19th century. Scientific development allowed mankind to become aware of the material dangers that threaten its existence. Accordingly, the idea of an end of the world started to be increasingly imagined, handled and

analyzed as a scientific possibility, independent of the existence and will of a supernatural entity.

Unlike the Abrahamic religions, which state that the end is inevitable, science treats it as a possible event. Currently, there is a multitude of scientific apocalyptic scenarios and, as knowledge progresses, their number increases. These types of scenarios are divided into two large categories: scenarios caused by the mechanics of the Universe and scenarios caused by social mechanics (self-destructive). Naturally, intermediate situations can also be imagined. Examples of scenarios caused by the mechanics of the Universe include Earth's collision with an asteroid or a comet, a killer virus, the eruption of a supervolcano, the destabilization of Earth's magnetic field or solar depletion. On the other hand, man can trigger an apocalypse through pollution and climate change, nuclear war or out of control experiments. Some scenarios are more likely to happen than others, but, overall, the end is improbable to take place in the near future. Nevertheless, we must never forget that all the theories and the statistics behind them are enunciated according to our limited level of understanding.

Although they are used interchangeably, prophecy and prediction is not one and the same thing. While prophecy is the result of divine revelation, prediction is the result of human calculations. Prophecy refers to a future state of things without any clues regarding this state in the present time. In turn, prediction is the rational operation of determining the future based on information available in the present. Our existence as a species and human society itself depend on our ability to predict the future. Finances, medicine, agriculture, weather or car industry – all the aspects of our life are based on planning the future and huge amounts of money are invested in all domains for determining what is about to happen.

The accuracy of predictions depends on the quantity and quality of the information and the computing power. Hence, the ratio between accuracy and temporal distance is inversely proportional. A short-term prediction has a good chance to be confirmed, whereas a long-term prediction has little chance. A long-term prediction is very similar to a prophecy, because both are based on too little information.

There are also situations when certain apocalyptic manifestations cannot be

classified as one or the other. This is the case of “religious prediction” – a statement about the future based on logic, empirical observations and connection between historical events and prophetic texts. He who makes a religious prediction does not claim divine illumination, but a correct correlation between history and divine prophecies: “if *a* , then *b* .” Nevertheless, religious prediction is, after all, a prophecy because according to Abrahamic scriptures the time of the end is a divine secret.

PART II. CHRISTIAN APOCALYPTIC HISTORY

Chapter I. THE CHRISTIAN EUROPEAN APOCALYPTIC MANIFESTATIONS

1. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL THEORIES OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANITY

For almost two millennia Christianity has ignited and fueled most of the apocalyptic manifestations that have occurred in the entire world. The main reason behind this aspect has been proselytism, amplified by the geographic and demographic spreading of Christians and by the political and economic power of the Christian nations. For centuries, Christianity has had the largest number of followers and it has dominated Europe, America, Australia and the south of Africa.

Christianity is a religion that transforms man into a being pleasing to God, capable of doing good and rejecting evil. Unlike Judaism, which is an elitist religion, destined to a small group of people, Christianity (and Islam) is an expansionist religion; it encourages the spreading of the gospel, as Jesus did, in order to convince non-Christians to convert. Christians are divinely urged to promote and export their faith through words and actions. All people, regardless of color, nationality, belief or sex, are equally loved by God and deserve to know the gospel in order to be saved. In this way, through missionaries and priests, Christ’s message about the end of the world came to

be heard all over the world.

1.1. ROME AS BABYLON THE GREAT

In the 1st century the Jewish people were under Roman domination. Due to this fact, the image of a liberating Messiah was more widespread and anticipated than ever. There was a powerful feeling of urgency and expectation because the Jews believed that, as in the case of the Egyptian and Babylonian captivities, the Messiah would appear and deliver them from the Roman bondage. On the other hand, many of the early Christians were Jews. As Paul the Apostle intimates in the letter to the church of Thessalonica, the new converts believed that the Second Coming of Christ, as the coming of the Messiah, was imminent:

> *Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).*

In the year 90 AD Clement I, bishop of Rome, [47] spread the word that the world may end at any moment. Likewise, in the 2nd century a bishop from Pontus, Asia Minor, told his followers that the end would come within two years and urged them to sell their goods and not to cultivate their lands. [48]

In its early days Christian eschatology was susceptible to external influences because Christianity as a religion was not yet clearly defined and doctrinally delimited from Judaism. It did not have a scripture of its own, structure or coherence. There was neither a clear distinction between canonical texts and apocryphal texts nor the dual classification of the Old and the New Testament. All sort of texts circulated in parallel. The natural result of this state of things was confusion, contradictory interpretations and the rise of sects such as Montanism. [49]

The Christian doctrine coagulated only in the 4th century. In the year 364 the Council of Laodicea divided all religious texts into two categories: canonical texts, which must be followed, and apocryphal texts, which must be ignored. In addition, the canonical writings were partitioned into two large groups,

having as a point of reference the birth of Christ: the Old Testament, which contains texts composed before his birth, and the New Testament, which contains texts composed after his birth. [50] It can be said therefore that the first five centuries were defining for the new Abrahamic religion. But the early theologians established not only the foundations of Christianity, but also the guiding lines of Christian eschatology. Their apocalyptic theories have been the most influential of all time, managing to survive to a certain extent up to this day.

At the moment the Book of Daniel is considered the most important prophetic text of the Old Testament and it describes events related to the fate of the Jewish people. In turn, the Book of Revelation is the most important prophetic text of the New Testament and it portrays events related to the fate of the world. But in first three centuries the situation was quite different. Without the distinction between the New and the Old Testament, the scholars granted the same value and importance to the two prophetic manuscripts: they describe the same things, events and periods of time, but from different points of view, complementing each other. The final events of the world were believed to be described by Daniel in the revelations he had during his captivity in Babylon (605-562 BC). The first revelation was received in a dream by King Nebuchadnezzar:

> *Thou, O king, sawest, and, behold, a great image. This image, which was mighty, and whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the aspect thereof was terrible. As for this image, its head was of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of brass, its legs of iron, its feet part of iron, and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon its feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them in pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, so that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art king of kings, unto whom the God of heaven hath given the kingdom, the power, and the strength, and the glory; and wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field*

and the birds of the heavens hath he given into thy hand, and hath made thee to rule over them all: thou art the head of gold. And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee; and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things; and as iron that crusheth all these, shall it break in pieces and crush. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron doth not mingle with clay. And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Daniel 2:31-44).

The second revelation was received by Daniel himself, also in a dream, in the first year of the reign of Belshazzar:

And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon two feet as a man; and a man's heart was given to it. And, behold, another beast, a second, like to a bear; and it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and, lo, another, like a leopard, which had upon its back four wings of a bird; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, a fourth beast, terrible and powerful, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were

plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. ... I beheld at that time because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake; I beheld even till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed, and it was given to be burned with fire. ... I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; until the ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom. Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all the kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And as for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise: and another shall arise after them; and he shall be diverse from the former, and he shall put down three kings. And he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time. But the judgment shall be set, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him (Daniel 7:3-8, 11, 21-27).

And a third revelation was received by Daniel in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar:

Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; and no beasts could stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and magnified himself. And as I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west over the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had the two horns, which I saw standing before the river, and ran upon him in the fury of his power. And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved

with anger against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns; and there was no power in the ram to stand before him; but he cast him down to the ground, and trampled upon him; and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. And the he-goat magnified himself exceedingly: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and instead of it there came up four notable [horns] toward the four winds of heaven. ... The ram which thou sawest, that had the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough he-goat is the king of Greece: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. And as for that which was broken, in the place whereof four stood up, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power (Daniel 8:3-8, 20-22).

The three revelations speak about the same events from different points of view, thus complementing each other.

The golden head of the image from the first vision and the lion with eagle's wings from the second vision are symbols for the Babylonian Empire (604-538 BC) (Daniel 2:37-38). The golden head represents the empire's richness, unmatched by any of the other three empires. The eagle's wings from the second vision symbolize the rapid expansion and the social and military mobility. But the beast that symbolizes the Babylonian Empire evolves: "the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon two feet as a man." At its beginnings the Babylonian Empire led a policy of conquest and enslavement, while toward the end of its existence the empire stagnated from a military point of view and focused on economic development. Revelation 18 depicts the fall of another Babylon, Babylon the Great (the Whore of Babylon). Since Babylon from Revelation and Babylon from the Book of Daniel share the same fate and the same features, the early scholars believed that the historical Babylon is one and the same with the apocalyptic Babylon.

The silver breast and arms of the image from the first vision, the bear raised up on one side (leaning on one leg) with three ribs in its mouth from the second vision, and the ram from the third vision are symbols for the double empire of the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 5:28). These two forces were united by Cyrus the Great in 538 BC for the conquest of Babylon. [51] The

bear suggests the brute force of the empire. Deficient in war tactic, the united forces of the Medes and the Persians relied on the large number of soldiers. The Medo-Persian Empire expanded its borders in three directions ("the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward") and it conquered three kingdoms: Lydia, Babylon and Egypt ("three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth"). The Persians were stronger and ruled longer than the Medes ("it was raised up on one side"; "the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other"). The silver symbolize richness, but also malleability or vulnerability; the Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon (the golden head) when the later was in decline. So, the richness of the Medo-Persians did not equal that of the Babylonians. The Medo-Persian Empire lasted only 200 years (at the end was only Persian). It collapsed on October 2, 333 BC, when the army of Darius III was crushed at Gaugamela by the Greek-Macedonians.

In the third series of symbols the brass belly and thighs of the image from the first vision are in connection with the leopard with four wings and four heads from the second vision and with the he-goat from the third vision. This is Greece under Alexander the Great. Alexander expanded the borders of his empire from the Mediterranean Sea to India. Again, the wings represent the speed of the conquests and the extraordinary mobility of the army. The speed in this case is also suggested by the symbol of the leopard, an animal that is very fast and agile, but lacks brute force. The Medo-Persian Empire collapsed due to the military campaigns of Alexander, as the ram was destroyed by the goat in Daniel's prophecy. Moreover, the Greek-Macedonian Empire expanded only eastward, having the appearance of a long strip on the world's map. For the conquered people, Alexander and his army came from the west (sunset), as Daniel says that "a he-goat came from the west." Nevertheless, the fast expansion led to a lack of centralization and administration of power. All the power of the goat relied in its horn, as the fate of the empire depended on the fate and the genius of the emperor. Alexander died prematurely at the age of 32 due to debauchery. The lack of an heir and the impossibility to establish the will of Alexander regarding his successor led to an immediate struggle for power between his four generals. In this way the empire came to be divided into four kingdoms: the Seleucid Empire (formed of Mesopotamia and Persia), Macedonia, Egypt and the combined territories of Asia Minor ("And as for that which was broken, in the place whereof four stood up, four

kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power"; "the beast had also four heads"). The territories from India were reclaimed by the former dominions.

Starting from these facts, the early Christian scholars had the task of discovering the kingdom symbolized by the iron legs of the image and the fourth beast, as well as the significance of the ten kingdoms and ten horns, and of the "stone cut out without hands" from the first vision and the "little horn" from the second vision. In the 3rd century Hippolytus of Rome offered a clear answer to these issues:

> *The golden head of the image and the lioness denoted the Babylonians; the shoulders and arms of silver, and the bear, represented the Persians and Medes; the belly and thighs of brass, and the leopard, meant the Greeks, who held the sovereignty from Alexander's time; the legs of iron, and the beast dreadful and terrible, expressed the Romans, who hold the sovereignty at present; the toes of the feet which were part clay and part iron, and the ten horns, were emblems of the kingdoms that are yet to rise; the other little horn that grows up among them meant the Antichrist in their midst; the stone that smites the earth and brings judgment upon the world was Christ.* [52]

Of the four world powers announced by God through Daniel, the Roman Empire has a special significance. In the first vision the iron is the hardest metal of the four, a symbol for the force, the durability and the military efficiency of the Romans. It was an empire based on stability. The conquests were slower, but more durable. While the lifespan of the other empires can be measured in tens or hundreds of years, Rome established an empire that lasted approximately 1,500 years, from 27 BC until 1453 AD. At the time of Hippolytus Roman authority was stretched on three continents and, if we take into consideration the period of the Roman Republic, it was already 600 years old, by far the world's mightiest and longest-lasting dominion.

The dreadful beast may symbolize the persecutions carried out against Jews and Christians in the first three centuries. In 70 AD the Romans destroyed the Holy Temple and in 133 they defeated the last major Jewish revolt, scattered the Jewish people and renamed the Jewish territory "Palestine." Likewise, the Roman emperors crucified Christ and led anti-Christian persecutions. For

these reasons, early Christians identified Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, with the Whore of Babylon described by John in Revelation 16, 17 and 18, especially the verse: “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth” (Revelation 17:19). Rome is located on seven hills and it has been occasionally called the “city of the seven hills” (Latin: *Septimontium*). And last but not least, the feminization of Rome in Revelation (“whore,” “woman”) may also be an allusion to Roman mythology, where the city of Rome was portrayed as the warrior goddess *Dea Roma* .

1.2. NERO THE JEW AS THE ANTICHRIST

Early Christians agreed that the fourth beast from Daniel’s visions refers to the Roman Empire, that the Whore of Babylon from Revelation refers to Rome and that the final events of the world were taking place in front of their eyes. The next piece that had to be found in the eschatological puzzle was the Antichrist.

Nowhere in Revelation is the name “Antichrist” mentioned; as in Daniel, the entities with negative connotation are symbolized through beasts. In the 2nd century Irenaeus of Gaul advanced the idea that the Beast 666 from Revelation 13 is one and the same with the “abomination of desolation” described by Jesus in the gospels (Matthew 24:15), named by the apostles the “Antichrist,” the “son of perdition,” the “man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:3), and by Daniel a “king of fierce countenance” (Daniel 8:23). [53] Furthermore, Irenaeus speculated that the ten horns from Daniel 7:7 are one and the same with the ten horns from Revelation 17:12-13: “And the ten horns that thou sawest are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour. These have one mind, and they give their power and authority unto the beast.” Hence, in the light of Daniel 7:24 (“And as for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise: and another shall arise after them”) he concluded that the entire Roman Empire was to fall apart and be divided into ten kingdoms: “In a still clearer light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicated to the Lord’s disciples what shall happen in the last times, and concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules [the earth] shall be partitioned.” [54]

For Irenaeus the “little horn” from Daniel referred to the kingdom of the Antichrist, that was going to rise after the ten kingdoms. The time of domination of the “little horn” – “a time and times and half a time” (Daniel 7:25) [55]– was a metaphor for a period of three and a half years. On the other hand, the stone “cut out without hands” was a symbol for the Second Coming and the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom: “And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:44). The short reign of the Antichrist was to be ended by Parousia. But, if the Whore of Babylon was Rome and the fourth beast from Daniel was the Roman Empire, then the Antichrist, thought to be a man, had to rise somehow from outside of Rome and yet from within the area of influence of the Roman Empire.

At the time of the apostles there was a constant friction between Jews, Christians and Romans. It was a triangle of hate. The Jews hated the Christians and the Romans because they denied the spiritual supremacy of the Jewish people. The Romans hated the Jews and the Christians because they contested the political supremacy of Rome. And the Christians hated the Jews and the Romans because they did not accept Jesus Christ as God and they killed him. According to Ignatius of Antioch, the disciple of John the Apostle, “any one says that the Lord is a mere man, he is a Jew, a murderer of Christ,” [56]while for Hippolytus, the disciple of Irenaeus, the Holy Temple was destroyed “because they killed the Son of their Benefactor, for He is coeternal with the Father. [57]

Judaism refused to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah and preferred to wait for another Messiah. Hence, Christians believed that the expected Jewish messiah is in fact the Antichrist and this is how the Jews turned into the people of the devil. In the light of Christ’s prophecies, Irenaeus was convinced that the Antichrist would rebuild the Holy Temple, destroyed by the Romans in the year 70: “When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (Matthew 24:15).

The image of the Jewish Antichrist was also supported by the prophecies of

the Old Testament, which seem to point toward the tribe of Dan: “The snorting of his horses is heard from Dan: at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones the whole land trembleth; for they are come, and have devoured the land and all that is in it; the city and those that dwell therein” (Jeremiah 8:16).

In Revelation 7 and 14 a number of 144,000 Jews are sealed as the people of God at the end of times. The Christian theologians believed that these are Jews who would oppose the Antichrist by converting to Christ’s religion. The 144,000 are composed of 12,000 people from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, but the tribe of Dan is excluded from the divine sealing and replaced with the tribe of Manasseh:

> *And in like manner also we find it written regarding Antichrist. For Moses speaks thus: “Dan is a lion’s whelp, and he shall leap from Bashan.” [Deuteronomy 33:22] ... “Dan,” he says, “is a lion’s whelp;” and in naming the tribe of Dan, he declared clearly the tribe from which Antichrist is destined to spring. For as Christ springs from the tribe of Judah, so Antichrist is to spring from the tribe of Dan.* [58]

Hippolytus believed that the Roman Empire would disintegrate into ten kingdoms, and the eleventh would be the kingdom of the Jews: “And under this [horn] was signified none other than Antichrist, who is also himself to raise the kingdom of the Jews.” [59] The reestablishment of the Jewish state would be followed by the advent of the Antichrist, his adulation by the Jews and the beginning of a military campaign for conquering the world. [60] This aspect can also be correlated with the fact that at the time Palestine was the scene of a multitude of Jewish messianic and prophetic manifestations. Hippolytus mentions only Simon Magus. Since the prophecies speak about false prophets and false teachings that have to appear at the end of time in order to stir up confusion, heretics such as Montanus were perceived as the allies of the devil. The Antichrist is supposed to imitate Christ in most aspects, including the doctrinal system:

> *Christ is a king, so Antichrist is also a king. The Saviour was manifested as a lamb; so he too, in like manner, will appear as a lamb, though within he is a wolf. The Saviour came into the world in the circumcision, and he will come in the same manner. The Lord sent apostles among all*

> *the nations, and he in like manner will send false apostles. ... The Saviour appeared in the form of man, and he too will come in the form of a man. The Saviour raised up and showed His holy flesh like a temple, and he will raise a temple of stone in Jerusalem.* [61]

The three and a half years of the Antichrist's reign imitate the three and a half years of Christ's ministry. Likewise, the deadly wound of the beast from Revelation 13:3, which miraculously heals and convinces the world to worship the beast, is an antithetical analogy to the miracle of the Resurrection. As Christ's resurrection is the foundation of Christianity, a similar miracle will sit as foundation for the religion of the Antichrist.

Irenaeus and Hippolytus made no nomination for the role of the Antichrist; they proved only that he was going to be a Jew. But, in the context of the Roman persecutions, it was extremely tempting to search for the Antichrist among the Roman emperors, the most powerful men in the known world. And of all the emperors, Nero received the most intriguing "reception."

Nero's persecutions against Christians and Jews were legendarily cruel. Even the Romans themselves were horrified by his savagery. In the year 68 the Senate repudiated him and condemned him to death, but Nero preferred instead to cut his throat. The end of Nero was a cause for celebration in Roman society, with his statues and monuments being immediately vandalized. Nevertheless, even after the death of the emperor the Romans had reasons to fear. During his lifetime seers foretold Nero that he would have to leave Rome for a throne in the East, and in his final days Nero spoke about a plan to flee to Parthia. Suetonius writes that only five people actually saw the emperor's body, while his funeral was not accompanied by the usual rituals. [62] This lack of closure gave rise to speculations: it was not known if he was really dead. In this confusing context a strange Roman legend came into being: *Nero redivivus* ("Nero resurrected"). Rumors said that he had managed to flee to Parthia, where he was gathering a numerous army in order to return and punish Rome for banishing him. And, to make matters worse, this legend triggered a couple of rebellions led by people who even claimed to be the returned Nero. [63]

Even though the subsequent emperors continued the persecutions initiated by Nero, none of them did it with such intensity. So, the Christian exegetes

fused the image of the Jewish Antichrist with the legend of *Nero redivivus* . Nero who returns to destroy Rome became the Antichrist (or the Beast 666) who destroys the Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17:16). In *Ascensio Isaiae* , a 2nd-century Christian pseudepigraphic text, the alleged apocalyptic revelations describe the Roman persecution of Christians while Nero, called "Beliar," is depicted as the biblical Antichrist:

> *these are the days of the completion of the world. After it is consummated, Beliar the great ruler, the king of the world, will descend, who hath ruled it since it came into being; yea, he will descend from his firmament in the likeness of a man, a lawless king, the slayer of his mother: [64] who himself (even) this king will persecute the plant which the Twelve Apostles of the Beloved have planted. Of the Twelve one will be delivered into his hands. [65] This ruler in the form of that king will come and there will come with him all the powers of this world. ... he will do and speak like the Beloved and he will say: "I am God and before me there hath been none." And all the people in the world will believe him. ... And he will set up his image before him in every city. And he shall bear sway three years and seven months and twenty-seven days. ... the Lord will come with his angels and ... He will drag Beliar into Gehenna and also his armies. [66]*

Oracula Sibyllina , a collection of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic verses written in Greek sometime between the 2nd and the 4th century, labeled Nero as a corrupter, snake, matricide, powerful king, wicked king, destroyer, who had the sign of the number 50 (N = 50 in Greek), who ran beyond Euphrates and was expected to return to destroy Rome: [67]

> *And one whose mark is fifty shall be lord,*
>
> *A dreadful serpent breathing grievous war,*
>
> *Who sometime stretching forth his hands shall make*
>
> *An end of his own race and stir all things,*
>
> ...

Then, making himself equal unto God,

Shall he return; but God will prove him naught. [68]

There is a significant resemblance between the legend of *Nero redivivus* – which says that Nero is heavily wounded to the neck (close to the head) but manages to survive and run – and the apocalyptic beast whose deadly wound is healed: "And [I saw] one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death-stroke was healed: and the whole earth wondered after the beast" (Revelation 13:3). Parthia, the place where according to the rumors Nero had fled, was located in Asia in the Iranian plateau. But the Christian scholars had a different point of view: they believed that Nero had gone to Palestine. Victorinus, bishop of Petabium, said that God revived Nero and sent him to become the king of the Jews and the Antichrist, and he would soon return at the head of a Jewish army to destroy Rome:

"The seven heads are the seven hills, on which the woman sitteth."] That is, the city of Rome. "And there are seven kings: five have fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he is come, he will be for a short time."] The time must be understood in which the written Apocalypse was published, since reigned Caesar Domitian; but before him had been Titus his brother; and Vespasian, Otho, Vitellius, and Galba. These are the five who have fallen. One remains, under whom the Apocalypse was written – Domitian, to wit. "The other has not yet come," speaks of Nerva; "and when he is come, he will be for a short time," for he did not complete the period of two years. "And the beast which thou sawest is of the seven."] Since before those kings Nero reigned. "And he is the eighth."] He says only when this beast shall come, reckon it the eighth place, since in that is the completion. ... Now that one of the heads was, as it were, slain to death, and that the stroke of his death was directed, he speaks of Nero. For it is plain that when the cavalry sent by the senate was pursuing him, he himself cut his throat. Him therefore, when raised up, God will send as a worthy king, but worthy in such a way as the Jews merited. [69]

In the 3rd century the Christian poet Commodianus said that "Nero shall be raised up from hell, Elias shall first come to seal the beloved ones" [70] or "for us Nero has become Antichrist." [71] Around 398 Jerome wrote that "there are

many of our viewpoint who think that Domitius Nero was the Antichrist because of his outstanding savagery and depravity." [72] "Domitius" was Nero's family name. And John Chrysostom, when he analyzed 2 Thessalonians 2:6-9, said that Nero the Antichrist is destined to destroy the Roman Empire in order to make room for his own kingdom:

> *"For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work." He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist. ... "Only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way," that is, when the Roman Empire is taken out of the way, then he shall come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one will willingly exalt himself, but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavor to seize upon the government both of man and of God. For as the kingdoms before this were destroyed, for example, that of the Medes by the Babylonians, that of the Babylonians by the Persians, that of the Persians by the Macedonians, that of the Macedonians by the Romans: so will this also be by the Antichrist, and he by Christ. [73]*

The Christian chronicler Sulpitius Severus also spoke about the belief that Nero had to be resurrected at the end of time:

> *It was accordingly believed that, even if he did put an end to himself with a sword, his wound was cured, and his life preserved, according to that which was written regarding him – "And his mortal wound was healed" – to be sent forth again near the end of the world, in order that he may practice the mystery of inequity. [74]*

Amid the unrest within the Western Roman Empire, Hilary, bishop of Poitiers, announced in the year 365 that the end of the world is a matter of a couple of months. [75] His disciple Martin, bishop of Tours, preached the advent of the Beast around the year 380. But for Martin the Antichrist was going to be different from Nero the resurrected:

> *Nero will rule in the Western portion of the world, after having subdued ten kings ... He also said that Antichrist, on the other hand, would first seize upon the empire of the East, having his seat and the capital of his kingdom at Jerusalem; while both the city and the temple would be*

restored by him. ... Nero was to be destroyed by Antichrist, and that the whole world, and all nations, were to be reduced under the power of Antichrist, until that impious one should be overthrown by the coming of Christ. He told us, too, that there is no doubt but that Antichrist, having been conceived by an evil spirit, was already born, and had, by this time, reached the years of boyhood, while he would assume power as soon as he reached the proper age. Now, this is the eighth year since we heard these words from his lips: you may conjuncture, then, how nearly about to happen are those things which are feared in the future. [76]

Even the number 666 (or 616) refers to Nero. First of all, the Book of Revelation was written in Greek and the original text uses in Revelation 13:17 the word *charagma* (χάραγμα) for "mark" (of the beast), which has the meaning of coin or stamping. In the year 66, when Nero was emperor, the Jews rebelled and created their own currency. In reaction, Nero established a rule through which no man could buy or sell unless he had a Roman certification. This practice was continued by subsequent emperors until the middle of the 3rd century. At the time of Decius no one could make trade unless he had the proof – *libellus* – that he had performed pagan Roman sacrifices. [77]

Second of all, the Hebrew language used, just like Latin and Greek, alphabetic letters to note numbers. This aspect popularized isopsephy [78] in Antiquity – the practice of deriving names from numbers. The Greek title *Neron Kaisar* (Νερων Καισαρ – "Nero Emperor") transliterated in Hebrew is NRWN QSR (נרון קסר), where 50 + 200 + 6 + 50 + 100 + 60 + 200 = 666. But the title in Latin is *Nero Caesar* , which transliterated in Hebrew becomes NRW QSR (נרו קסר) and gives the result 616. [79] The custom of transliteration from one language to another was widespread at the time of the apostles; John 19:19-20 shows that Pilate put the inscription "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" above the head of Jesus in Greek, Latin and Hebrew. Therefore, although Revelation was written in Greek, the number 666 was a Hebrew code for Nero.

Liber genealogicus is a chronology written in Latin by an unknown Christian Donatist in the 5th century. The Donatists, named after the founder Donatus Magnus, were North African schismatics who separated themselves from the

main body of Christianity on reasons of ecclesiastical purity at the time of Emperor Diocletian. *Liber genealogicus* enumerates persons and events in chronological order from Adam until the 5th century of the Christian era. Toward the end of the chronology it speaks about the persecution of the Christians under emperors Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Decius, Valerian and Diocletian. And, after it quotes a portion from Revelation 13:18, the text shows that the numerical value of the word *Antichristvs* (1 + 13 + 18 + 9 + 3 + 9 + 17 + 9 + 18 + 19 + 20 + 18) is 154. But this, if it is multiplied by 4 according to the number of letters from the word "Nero," gives the result 616. [80]

Lactantius Firmianus mocked the idea of Nero rising from the dead to reign again and he criticized *Oracula Sibyllina* for its reference to Nero. [81] But the "equal unto God" from the verse of the sibyl resembles Paul's statement from 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4: "he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God ... setting himself forth as God." Augustine of Hippo felt obliged to disapprove any connection between the two:

> *Some think that the Apostle Paul referred to the Roman Empire, and that he was unwilling to use language more explicit, lest he should incur the calumnious charge of wishing ill to the empire which it was hoped would be eternal; so that in saying, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work," he alluded to Nero, whose deeds already seemed to be as the deeds of Antichrist. And hence some suppose that he shall rise again and be Antichrist. Others, again, suppose that he is not even dead, but that he was concealed that he might be supposed to have been killed, ... and will live until he is revealed in his own time and restored to his kingdom. But I wonder that men can be so audacious in their conjectures. [82]*

Eusebius of Caesarea adopted the most interesting position in this theological scandal. Eusebius did not name Nero as the Antichrist, but he stated that Revelation and the prophecies of the New Testament were fulfilled in the 1st century, when the Temple was destroyed. For Eusebius, the prophecies were addressed to the Christians who were living at the moment of their writing. Similarly to the Jewish apocalyptic tracts, John offered the prophecy about the fall of the Roman Empire, the destruction of the Jewish people and the victory of Christendom in order to encourage his fellow Christians. [83]

Although he does not mention the name “Nero,” Irenaeus says that the usage of the number 616 is based on a corrupt version of the Bible. Instead, 666 must be the correct number because the Flood came when Noah was 600 years old (Genesis 7:6) and the golden image set up by Nebuchadnezzar was 60 cubits high and six cubits wide (Daniel 3:1). [84] Irenaeus advanced a series of solutions to the numerical riddle of 666. Similar to the Romans, the Greeks assigned numerical value to objects using alphabetic symbols. For example, in Latin the symbol “I” can signify the number “1” or the letter “i.” Likewise, in Greek the symbol “A” (άλφα – alpha) may stand for the letter “a” or for the number “1.” In Latin there are only six symbols for six numerical values, while in Greek every alphabetic symbol has a numerical correspondent. Irenaeus took the numerical values of the Greek letters of the word *Lateinos* (λατεινοσ) and obtained: 30 + 1 + 300 + 5 + 50 + 70 + 200 = 666. The word *Euanthas* (ευανθασ) has the same numerical value: 5 + 400 + 1 + 50 + 9 (TH) + 1 + 200 = 666. But Irenaeus offers no suggestion as to what this word might mean. The case of *Teitan* (τειταν) seems to be more interesting: 300 + 5 + 10 + 300 + 1 + 50 = 666. *Teitan* might be an allusion to titans, who rebelled against the gods in Greek mythology, to Satan, who rebelled against God, or to the imperial family named “Titus,” that ruled in the 1st century. Vespasian, Titus and Domitian were part of this family and all three were involved in anti-Jewish and anti-Christian actions. [85]

The Book of Daniel and the Revelation of John were not the only sources of panic. Until the establishment of the Bible in the 4th century fear was disseminated by apocryphal apocalypses as well. The Apocalypse of Peter, the Apocalypse of Paul, the Apocryphal Apocalypse of John or the Apocalypse of the Virgin – they all spoke about the (imminent) decadence and the tribulations that would fall upon the world. To these the apocryphal Jewish apocalypses may also be added: the Apocalypse of Daniel, the Apocalypse of Abraham, the Apocalypse of Adam or the Apocalypse of Moses. [86] Of the Christian apocryphal texts, the Apocryphal Apocalypse of John is the only one that makes a (symbolic) description of the Antichrist:

> *The appearance of his face is dusky; the hairs of his head are sharp, like darts; his eyebrows like a wild beast’s; his right eye like the star which rises in the morning, and the other like a lion’s; his mouth about one cubit; his teeth span long; his fingers like scythes; the print of his feet of*

two spans; and on his face an inscription, Antichrist; [87]

The manifestation of the Son of Perdition was initially imagined as a return to a global chaos. The pre-medieval and medieval Antichrist was mainly an oppressor, not a corrupter, as he is depicted in the 21st century. He had the form of an armed threat, of a warrior and of a military genius from outside Christianity. After the disintegration of the Roman Empire into ten parts, the Antichrist was to reestablish the Jewish kingdom. And then, he was to conquer the world with the help of the Jewish people, impose a false religion (the apostasy) through force, and start the darkest period in human history (the great tribulation).

1.3. THE MILLENNIAL WEEK

The early Christians were very interested in determining the exact age of the world and the establishment of a precise general chronology. Tatian of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, Sextus Julius Africanus of Jerusalem, Eusebius, Irenaeus or Hippolytus tried to accurately date Adam's creation, Noah's Flood, the death of Moses, the Exodus from Egypt or the building of the Temple by Solomon. [88] But the primary purpose of general chronologies was not to determine the end of the world, but to confer legitimacy to Christianity by depicting a religious and historical frame to its emergence. This chronological system – which has as point of reference the moment of the Creation – was called *Anno Mundi* in the Latin West and *Etos Kosmou* (Ετος Κόσμου) in the Greek East. Both expressions can be translated as the "Age of the Universe."

The age of the world was studied mainly in the East, especially after the change of the empire's capital to Constantinople and the migration of the scholars. Western Christianity had knowledge about this system, but it has never officially adopted it. The earliest Christian study regarding the world's age was that of Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, in the 2nd century in the work *Apologia ad Autolycum* (III:24-28). By using *Septuaginta* , Theophilus presented a detailed chronology which started with the creation of Adam in 5529 BC and ended with the reign of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. [89]

Chronographiai of Sextus Julius Africanus covers history beginning with the

year 5499 BC, the creation of Adam, until the year 221 AD, the moment of the writing of the study. By correlating Chaldean and Egyptian chronologies and Greek mythology with Jewish and Christian history, Africanus calculated a temporal distance of 5,500 years between the Creation and the birth of Jesus, with the First Coming or the Incarnation on the first day of the year 5501 (on March 25, 1 AD; at that time the 25th of March was believed to mark the spring equinox). [90]

The African bishop Julius Hilarion concluded that there were 5,530 years between the Creation and the crucifixion of Jesus. In *Chronologia sive Libellus de Mundi Duratione* (397) he calculated, based on the writings of Africanus, that there were 2,237 years between the Creation and the Flood, 1,012 years between the Flood and the call of Abraham, and 430 years between Abraham and the Israelite exodus from Egypt. Hilarion expressly mentioned that at the end of the 6,000 years, around 498 AD, the end of the world would come. [91]

Eusebius also used the work of Africanus to conceive a chronology in *Chronicon* . Initially, Eusebius used an era which began with the birth of Abraham in 2016 BC. [92] Jerome adopted the chronology of Eusebius and translated it into Latin, adding an appendix that covered the years 325-379. Both Eusebius and Jerome dated the Creation in 5199 BC. [93]

Panodoros of Alexandria set the date of the Creation in 5493 BC based on Egyptian calendars, in which the years began on the 29th of August. [94] Annianus of Alexandria rejected the computations of Panodoros on the ground that they were based too much on pagan sources to the detriment of the Christian ones and, in reaction, around the year 400 he designed his own chronological system. He placed the Creation on March 25, 5492 BC, and the birth of Jesus in the year 9 AD (in the Julian calendar). He also shifted the era of Panodoros with approximately six months and placed the Annunciation on the 25th of March and Christmas nine months later (the period of gestation), on the 25th of December, as they are known at the moment. Annianus, however, relied heavily on mysticism in his calculations; he believed, like many of his contemporaries, that there is a divine order in the flowing of time. This is why the creation of Adam, the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ were put on the same date of the 25th of March, while the first two

events were separated by exactly 5,500 years. [95]

Mysticism helped Annianus's chronological system become popular in Byzantium, where it was adopted by personalities such as Maximus the Confessor, Theophanes the Confessor and George Syncellus. A new version of the Creation was suggested in *Chronicon Paschale* , a chronicle of the world written around 630 by the scholars of Antioch. This dates the creation of Adam on March 21, 5507 BC. [96] Instead, in *Etymologiae* Isidore of Seville placed the Creation in 5210 BC, but he also partitioned history in eras, with the birth of Jesus as starting point for the sixth era. [97]

The multitude of versions in establishing the date of the Creation was due to the lack of historical and chronological information, faulty computations intertwined with mysticism, the problem of the paschal computation and the placement of the great celebrations in accurate positions relative to each other. All general chronologies have faced problems that have generated further reactions and respectively new computations and new dates of the Creation. The official adoption of one chronological system or another was made, therefore, not on reasons of accuracy, but on political or mystical arguments. In any case, establishing an accurate date for the world's age turned into an obsession that haunted the Christian Church until the advent of Darwinism.

Interestingly, the Jews were also interested in the world's age, but they came to very different results. Until the 2nd century the Jews had had different dating systems in different historical times. [98] The most commonly used was the year of the reign of the king: "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of Jehovah" (1 Kings 6:1). In *Antiquitates Judaicae* (94) the Romano-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus estimated the world's age to be around 5,000 years. [99] Instead, in *Seder Olam Rabbah* (165) Rabbi Jose ben Halafta, relying on the Masoretic Text, argued that the world's age was 3,925 years, with the creation of Adam in 3760 BC. [100] Halafta's conclusions have not been universally accepted within the Jewish communities, but they show the fact that there was a discrepancy of almost 2,000 years between the Christian chronologies and the Jewish ones.

Hippolytus made a chronology of the world starting with the banishment of the first people from Paradise and ending with the year 234 AD. And, like Africanus, he placed between the creation of Adam and the birth of Christ exactly 5,500 years. [101] The computations of Hippolytus had apocalyptic purpose; he believed that the past is the key to unlock the future. Both Irenaeus and Hippolytus were guided in their eschatological investigations by a matrix that reflects the Creation and the existential aspects of the Israelite people: the "six-plus-one" pattern.

"Six plus one" seems to be the omnipresent pattern of Yahweh and the foundation of all things. God made the world in six days, and in the seventh he rested (Genesis 2:2). The Creation Week was reflected in the Ten Commandments as the Law of the Sabbath: again, six days of work, one of rest (Exodus 20:11). Yahweh was so serious in this regard that he instructed the Israelites to kill whoever shall transgress this commandment (Exodus 31:15-17). And another permutation of this principle is in the sabbatical year, which refers to nature's cycle of regeneration: "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruits thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath unto Jehovah: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard" (Leviticus 25:3-4).

The problem of the world's age became even more complicated due to the controversial concept of the Millennium. Revelation says very briefly that after the defeat of the Antichrist there will be a period of 1,000 years in which Jesus will lead the world in a direct and personal way (Revelation 20:4). This matter was first analyzed by Polycarp and Papias of Hierapolis in the first two centuries. Papias, for example, described the Millennium as a golden age marked by miracles and blessings through Christ, abundant fruits and relations of peace between both men and animals. Melito of Sardis, Ambrose of Milan, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Methodius or Lactantius Firmianus, discussed more or less this matter, usually in relation to the issue of resurrection. This is the time when the doctrine of millennialism or chiliasm – the 1,000-year kingdom of Jesus Christ – was founded. Nevertheless, Eusebius vehemently contested the belief in a future Millennium, [102] criticizing Papias for misinterpreting the words and the actions of the apostles. [103] Eusebius supported his amillenarism through the example of the

Nicolaitanes, a sect which believed that the kingdom of 1,000 years would be earthly, characterized by pleasures and delights of physical order. [104]

Irenaeus and Hippolytus combined the chiliastic belief, the six-plus-one pattern and the chronology of the world relying on the claim of Peter the Apostle: “that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). This is how the doctrine the “millennial week” came into being, which says that the Millennium is the sabbatical period of 1,000 years established by Christ when 6,000 years since the creation of Adam are completed. For Irenaeus even the number 666 was in fact a metaphor for the 6,000 years of the world’s existence: “six times a hundred, six times ten, and six units. [He gives this] as a summing up of the whole of that apostasy which has taken place during six thousand years. For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded.” [105]

Both Irenaeus and his disciple Hippolytus merged chronology with mysticism. And, as Irenaeus chose 666 to the detriment of 616 based on Noah’s age and the golden image described by Nebuchadnezzar, Hippolytus attempted to find the remaining years until the completion of the six millennia in the dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant:

> *And 6,000 years must needs be accomplished, in order that the Sabbath may come, the rest, the holy day “on which God rested from all His works.” For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they “shall reign with Christ,” when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse: for “a day with the Lord is as a thousand years.” Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that 6,000 years must be fulfilled. ... For He says to him, ... “and thou shalt make the length of it two cubits and a half, and the breadth thereof one cubit and a half, and a cubit and a half the height;” [Exodus 25:10] which measures, when summed up together, make five cubits and a half, so that the 5500 years might be signified thereby. ... From the birth of Christ, then, we must reckon the 500 years that remain to make up the 6000, and thus the end shall be.* [106]

The six days of Creation described in Genesis became symbols for the periods of the world’s existence. Each day symbolized 1,000 years, which

meant that the world in its current form was supposed to exist for only 6,000 years. At the fulfillment of the six millennia God was expected to intervene through the Second Coming, destroy the Antichrist and establish the period of 1,000 years of peace and prosperity corresponding to the Sabbath. And, although the early Christian chronologies had variations of hundreds of years regarding the date of the Creation, most of them projected the fulfillment of the 6,000 years between the 4th and the 8th century.

1.4. FROM BABYLON THE GREAT TO THE CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

In the 4th century, after Emperor Constantine the Great converted and he granted religious freedom to all citizens, Christianity became the dominant belief of the empire. It was a political change that triggered religious ones. On the one hand, for the early Christians the Roman Empire was the Whore of Babylon (negative connotation), "drunk with the blood of the saints" (Christians) that it persecuted and killed. Rome was a damned city and the capital of an empire of abomination and martyrdom. It was the sanctuary of Satan's acolytes, the emperor and the senate, from whose mouths the orders of execution, torture and confiscation were coming.

On the other hand, for the non-Christian Romans Rome was the cradle of civilization itself, the city established through the will and the blessing of the gods, the factor of stability that was preventing the world to return to chaos. Rome was more than a capital-city; it was an icon of unity, progress and civilization. Jews believe that Jerusalem holds a major role in God's universal plan; in the same way the Romans saw the "city of the seven hills" as the heart of mankind. Rome was worshiped by its own citizens and surnamed the "Eternal City" – an idea advanced by Publius Vergilius Maro in the epic poem *Aeneid* (I:275-279). In this the gods granted to the Romans never-ending imperialism:

Then Romulus, wolf-nursed and proudly clad

In tawny wolf-skin mantle, shall receive

The sceptre of his race. He shall uprear

The war-god's citadel and lofty wall,

And his Romans his own name bestow.

To these I give no bounded times or power,

But empire without end. *[107]*

So, the fall of Rome meant not only the destruction of a city, but also the destruction of civilization and the throwing of the world into the primordial chaos. But after the reign of Constantine and the mass conversion of the Romans to Christianity, the positive-pagan importance of Rome in the history of the world and its eschatological negative-Christian role merged into a singular image. Rome and the Roman Empire remained essential elements in the divine plans for mankind, but they turned into protective entities of Christianity. Rome became a hallowed place through the sacrifice of Peter the Apostle, a city now blessed by God, a spiritual pole of the world and a pillar of civilization. The Roman Empire became synonymous with the "Christian Empire," while the imperial administration turned into the political institution within which the religion of Christ found favorable conditions for development. The fall of the Eternal City and of the empire no longer meant a fall into chaos according to the pagan prophecy of the 12 vultures, but a destruction of the religion of Christ according to Christian prophecies. Lactantius Firmianus, one of Emperor Constantine's advisers, announces the destruction of Rome due to the persecution carried out against the early Christians, but at the same time he links the destiny of the world to that of the empire:

the fall and ruin of the world will shortly take place; except that while the city of Rome remains it appears that nothing of this kind is to be feared. But when the capital of the world shall have fallen, and shall have begun to be a street, which the Sibyls say shall come to pass, who can doubt that the end has now arrived to the affairs of men and the whole world? It is that city, that only, which still sustains all things; and the God of heaven is to be entreated by us and implored – if, indeed, His arrangements and decrees can be delayed – lest, sooner than we think for, that detestable tyrant should come who will undertake so great a deed, and dig out that eye, by the destruction of which the world itself is

about to fall. [108]

From now on the enemies of Rome were the enemies of Christ, and the enemies of Christ were the enemies of Rome. Everything that was outside the empire or outside the Christian religion began to be perceived as barbarous, crude and pagan. In the year 378 the Roman armies clashed with those of the Goths at Adrianople. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, had previously identified the Goths with Gog described in Ezekiel 38. When rumors about the victory of the barbarians reached his ears, he felt that the world was on the brink of destruction. Likewise, Jerome expected the collapse of Roman civilization and the end of the world when the Huns – seen as Magog from Revelation 20:7-10 – invaded the territories of the Eastern Roman Empire. [109]

As long as they were being persecuted, Christians believed that the pain they endured had to have a purpose and a reward; the period of hardship was to be followed by a period of peace and prosperity. But after Constantine legalized Christianity and the official hostility was replaced with the support for the church the East and the West began to have increasingly different eschatological points of view. Premillenarism continued to be the dominant perspective in the West because the Western Roman Empire was decomposing and the prospects were grim. Western Christians believed that the Roman Empire would turn into or it would be followed by the Millennium.

The idea of a future Millennium was mainly rejected in the East for the reason that it was an influence of Jewish eschatology and the dualistic Messianic Age. The first who opposed chiliasm was Marcion of Sinope in the 2nd century. [110] Later, Origen of Alexandria argued that the Christian hope is in Heaven, not on earth, and believers must give a spiritual interpretation to the Book of Revelation. Tyconius the Donatist also denied two distinct bodily resurrections and an earthly kingdom of 1,000 years. He said instead that at the resurrection, which would be only one, all souls would more or less rise to Heaven due to God's omnibenevolence, so that no part of mankind that was animated by a soul would perish. [111] At the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD millenarism was categorized as a superstition [112] and, in order to rule out any idea of a future divine kingdom of 1,000 literal years, the following phrase was introduced in the Nicene Creed: "whose kingdom shall

have no end" (according to Luke 1:33: "and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end").

The amillenarist position was also reaffirmed in 431, at the Council of Ephesus, according to the teachings of Augustine. Due to the exaggerations and rude materialism of many chiliasts, in *De civitate Dei* Augustine replaced the earthly millennial reward with the spiritual one. He sympathized with the idea that history is divided into seven eras according to the seven days of Creation, but he denied the counting of the 6,000 years. He preached the doctrine demanded by the times and, applying an allegorical interpretation, he depicted the Millennium as an image of the perfect number 10 (10 x 10 x 10, according to Pythagorean influences), whose completion in years is unknown. That Millennium of perfect peace which the Bible speaks of is not possible on the earth, but only in Heaven. It started with Satan's binding during the teachings of Jesus Christ and it continues until the Second Coming. Christians live within the invisible Millennium and the new birth of the believer was the first resurrection shown in Revelation 20. [113] Likewise, Revelation 20:1-6 is a "recapitulation" of the previous chapters and it does not describe a new era that chronologically follows after the events from Revelation 19.

Most of Daniel's prophecies were confirmed by history, but they failed at the most important part: the end of the world. This thing not only invalidated the interpretations of the early Christians but also puts into question the authenticity of the prophecies as a whole. Irenaeus gave no importance to the fact that the iron legs of the image from the first vision were two in number; he ignored them because the image had a human-like appearance. But these symbolize the division of the empire's spheres of power: the Western Roman Empire with the capital in Rome and the Eastern Roman Empire with the capital in Constantinople. The division of the empire was made in the year 330 by Constantine the Great in order to increase the efficiency of the administration over the vast conquered territories.

In the 5th century the Western Roman Empire was dying, being mercilessly dismembered by the waves of marauders. In 410 Alaric's Visigoths plundered everything that got in their way, including Rome, making Jerome, at that time a citizen of Rome exiled to Bethlehem, exclaim: "But when the

bright light of all the world was put out, or, rather, when the Roman Empire was decapitated, and, to speak more correctly, the whole world perished in one city." [114] Christians saw the fall of Rome as a punishment for the massacres from the past and a necessary element of the end; on the contrary, pagans – as Augustine shows at the beginning of *De civitate Dei* – saw it as a revenge of the gods for their replacement with Christianity. In 455 it was the turn of the Vandals to invade and sack Rome and enforce once again the belief in an imminent dissolution of the empire and an end of the world. *Liber genealogus* , which is an amalgam made from the combination of the previous chronologies, [115] after it shows that the number of the Antichrist is 616, it names Genseric, the king of the Vandals, as the returned Nero and the Antichrist. [116] Finally, in 476 Emperor Romulus Augustus was forced by the Germanic general Odoacer to abdicate, an event that marked, from a modern point of view, the dissolution of the Western Roman Empire.

Certainly, the collapse of the empire was not followed by the rise of the Antichrist and the end of the world – issues that medieval scholars tried to explain through their own apocalyptic theories. Nevertheless, the early eschatological paradigm has been a starting point for the later speculations, particularly the development of the millennial week theory. It is interesting that even though Rome and the Roman Empire gained a positive image, the initial suffering and persecution became defining elements of the image of the early Church and a support for the sects that later claimed a rebirth of the original worship. Quakers, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses or the suicidal Davidians – every single cult or branch of Christianity has pretended that they are the true restorers or the rightful followers of the apostles and they have cursed society as a whole for its uncleanness. They never question their aberrant doctrines, but they see the persecution from the "decayed" society as a necessary baptism of fire through which they prove themselves that they have a special role in God's plan.

2. THE APOCALYPSES OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE MIDDLE AGES

2.1. THE RELIGIOUS DECADENCE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE CONFLICT WITH ISLAM

The dissolution of the Western Roman Empire threw Western Europe into chaos, causing regress on all plans. During the Early Middle Ages (500-1000 AD) Europe had to endure the highest waves of migratory people, a decrease of population, the lowest level of commerce since the Bronze Age, a drastic decrease of resources, of the standard of living and of the level of culture. Moreover, the collapse of the empire left a political and administrative void that, in one way or another, had to be filled. There was an acute need for a unifying system that could revive the Roman organization, but the only thing that could gain the obedience of the people in that context, no matter the language, skin color and culture, was the belief in divinity. So, the only institution capable of imposing itself in Western European society at the beginning of the Middle Ages was the church. The problem was that the filling of this void of power came at a price: the extension of the institutional features. While in the southeastern part of Europe the Byzantine Empire performed further on the role of regional stabilizer and protector of the church, in the western part of the continent the institution of the church was forced to assume a dual role: a political and a religious one. This meant that the religious structure copied the political one. The need for centralization granted authority to the Bishopric of Rome over the other Western bishoprics, which ultimately led to the establishment of the Papacy. The politicalization of the church subsequently started a progressive doctrinal separation between the Eastern and the Western Christian churches, which culminated in the 11th century with the Great Schism.

The domination of society by the church had baleful effects: knowledge was limited to monastic centers and the biblical monopoly suppressed critical thinking. In the period of the empire the church was under the imperial control, authority and protection; this state of things ensured a sort of balance between religion and science. Scholars of any kind had access to various sources of information, which allowed both religion and science to evolve. After the fall of the empire, this balance was broken: science was suppressed by religion and superstitions, while the Bible became the reference point in understanding the Universe and a means for the manipulation of the masses. The dissolution of the empire was followed by a significant qualitative and quantitative weakness of the intellectual frame. Christianity inherited the Greco-Roman obsession for rituals, prodigies and omens, while the doctrinal holes were filled with mythical beliefs that gave rise to heresies and

dangerous manifestations. The involution of Western society left the impression that people were at the mercy of a dying universe, which strengthened the premillenarist point of view.

In this poisonous environment some saw the religious connection to the crowds as an extraordinary occasion to achieve power. In *Historia Francorum* Gregory of Tours describes in detail the case of Christ of Bourges, a 6th-century false messiah. This was initially a woodman in the region of Bourges (France), until he became the subject of a "machination of the devil": he was stung by a swarm of flies, causing him to be in a delirious state of mind for two years. When he recovered he turned into a wandering preacher. At Javols he gathered a group of admirers, found a concubine who called herself the "Virgin Mary" and announced the imminent return of Christ. Some brought him sick people in order to heal them through the simple touch, while others worshiped him as the returned Messiah. But after he sent completely naked messengers to Le Puy-en-Velay to announce his arrival, Bishop Aurelius arranged to have him assassinated.

All those who stood against the institution of the church were denigrated in the annals of history. In the 8th century the prelate Boniface describes the renegade bishop Aldebert as a fraud, blasphemer and demagogue who manipulated the ignorant mob for his personal benefits. Aldebert claimed that he was a saint and an angel had given him holy artifacts brought from the ends of the earth. One of these was a letter from Christ in which it was written that Aldebert had fallen from the sky and that he had been caught by Michael the Archangel, or that God was fulfilling his every desire. He used his "divine" authority to have sexual intercourse with women, demanded his followers to exclude any other religious figure and shared his hair and nails as sacred objects. In what Boniface considered to be the most heinous sin, the false messiah claimed that he knew the sins of his followers and forgave them before they were confessed to him – an exclusive attribute of the Trinity. For these reasons, in 746 a council in Rome excommunicated Aldebert and ordered his imprisonment. [117]

The success of the messiahs reflects the intellectual and material isolation of the church. The Bible is clear about how the Second Coming will happen. And yet, the laymen seem helpless and vulnerable to this kind of phenomena.

In 847 the diocese of Constance (in the German regions) was disturbed by the terrifying prophecies of the pseudo-prophetess Thiota. In a patriarchal world, dominated by men, a female prophet stirred the curiosity of the crowds. In the Bible the prophetic message is entrusted by God only to men – an aspect linked by medieval theologians with the sin of Eve and the weak nature of women. Hence, a female prophet was analogous to a left-handed person: they were both associated with heresy and demonic possession. The synod in Saint Alban in Mainz came to the same conclusion. But, in order to avoid the death penalty, Thiota confessed her sins and got only a public whipping. [118]

While society was perturbed by chaotic heresies, behind the walls of monasteries the early eschatological theories were passed from generation to generation and "recycled" by scholars according to the new historical context. In *Historia Francorum* Gregory of Tours presented a brief history of the world, from Adam until the death of Sigebert in the year 575. He drew his inspiration mainly from Jerome and Eusebius, who set the Creation in 5199 BC, and accordingly he expected the six millennia to end sometime between the years 799 and 806. [119]

Two hundred years later Beatus, abbot of Liébana (Spain), took Gregory's chronology and integrated it in *Commentaria in Apocalypsin* . This was a work of great erudition but without much originality. Like Gregory, Beatus compiled the theories of early scholars such as Augustine, Ambrose, Irenaeus, Jerome or Tyconius. [120] He said that there are 2,242 years between Adam and Noah, 942 years between Noah and Abraham, 505 years between Abraham and Moses and 5,227 years between Adam and Christ. The millennial week was about to be completed in 14 years, in the year 838 of the Spanish era (or the year 800 in the current calendar). Nevertheless, the abbot of Liébana remained cautious; although the calculations indicated a close end of the world, he added that the remaining time is not a subject of human discovery and God has the power to alter the time. [121]

Commentaria in Apocalypsin enjoyed success because it was heavily illustrated. At a time when the ability to read was a rare gem, the illustrations of Beatus were a blessing for the illiterates. Revelation is displayed in images exactly the way it is narrated: Beatus did not interpret the symbols and he tried to be as neutral as possible. His drawings make no reference to a certain

nation, leader or state of affairs: men are attacked by lions with locust head, angels literally pour blood and hail from the skies, a lamb armed with a cross is depicted fighting a giant snake, or the siege of Jerusalem is illustrated with weapons used at that time. [122]

Beatus's work shows that decoding the world's age became an inseparable and integrant part of the millennial week. Nevertheless, the interest of Beatus in the millennial week might have also been boosted by the start of the Islamic oppression in the Iberian Peninsula. Christianity had from the start an antagonistic perspective toward Islam. Information about Muhammad and the Islamic religion appeared in the Byzantine Empire shortly after the Prophet's death. The work *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* reproduces a dialog between a recent convert to Christianity and a couple of Jews who report different aspects about Muhammad:

> *They say that the prophet has appeared coming with the Saracens, and is proclaiming the advent of the anointed one who is to come. And I [Abraham], went off to Sykamina, and referred the matter to an old man very well-versed in the Scriptures. I asked him: "What is your view, master and teacher, of the prophet who has appeared among the Saracens?" he replied, groaning mightily: "He is a false prophet: do the prophets come armed from head to toe? These latter events are truly the works of chaos, and I fear that the first Christ to come, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God, and we instead are preparing to receive Armilus [123] [the Antichrist]. Indeed, Isaiah said that the Jews would retain a perverted and hardened heart until all the earth should be devastated. But you go off, Master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared." So I, Abraham, made enquiries, and was told by those who met him that there is no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He says also that he has the keys of paradise [held only by Peter the Apostle according to Matthew 16:19], which is incredible. [124]*

In the 8th century in *Pege Gnoseos* John of Damascus characterized Muhammad as a false prophet and compared his teachings to the Byzantine heresy of Arianism. On the contrary, Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem, said nothing about a prophet or a religion of the Arabs; for him the Arab

attacks were divine punishments for the sins of Christians. [125]

In the Iberian Peninsula, after the city of Córdoba was conquered by Muslims in 711, Christians found themselves persecuted by the invaders: they could no longer openly practice their belief, the bells and the sermons were forbidden, the churches and the monasteries were destroyed, and the persecutions often degenerated into bloody conflicts. In the given context, Revelation took an entirely new meaning for the oppressed. Muhammad was said to be the Antichrist or the False Prophet from Revelation 13 who gives power to the Antichrist (also identified with the Caliphate), while the Emirate of Córdoba was Babylon the Great. In 848, in the region of Navarra, Eulogius of Córdoba found a text in the monastery of Leyre which said that Muhammad's year of death was 666, Islam was the product of the devil and Muslims were the people of the devil. In 854, in the region of Andalusia, in *Indiculus luminosus* the chronicler Paulus Alvarus compared the Prophet with the Antichrist and the beasts mentioned by Daniel. In 883 a clergyman in Ovideo, in the region of Asturia, edited *Cronica profetica* , within which the Muslim dynasties, beginning with Abraham and Ishmael, were placed in a prophetic context open for interpretation in the light of Ezekiel 38-39. [126] The negative image of Muhammad and Islam spread from the Iberian Peninsula across Europe and it was the source of the medieval apocalyptic fears. Under the siege of Islam the end of the world became synonymous with the end of Christianity, while Revelation became the driving force of the *Reconquista* – a long campaign of regaining the Iberian Peninsula that prefaced the crusades.

Beatus's *Commentaria in Apocalypsin* also fed the anti-Islamic rhetoric, but it did much more than that: it contributed to the formation of an empire. At the time of its writing Christian Europe was assaulted by Islam from two sides: in the southeast, through the Middle East and the Balkan Peninsula, and in the southwest, through the Iberian Peninsula. In the southeast Christianity was protected by the Byzantine Empire, but in the southwest there was only the natural barrier of the Pyrenees Mountains. Western Europe was partially Christianized, divided, disorganized and vulnerable. In addition, Westerners questioned the religious and political legitimacy of the Byzantine Empire. If we take into account Bede the Venerable's words, the veritable Roman Empire could only be the one whose capital was in Rome: "As long as the

Coliseum stands, Rome shall stand; when the Coliseum falls, Rome will fall; when Rome falls, the world will fall." [127] So, the nonexistence of the Roman Empire, together with the completion of the 6,000 years in 800 AD, was like an invitation for the rise of the Antichrist. Western Europe needed a Christian superpower both from a political and religious point of view. And this collective need was satisfied in less than half a century.

2.2. THE PROPHECY OF THE MESSIANIC EMPEROR

Constantine the Great became Roman emperor in 306. He converted to Christianity in 312, but he continued to hold the pagan position of *Pontifex Maximus* (a title discarded later by emperors, but taken by the Papacy: the "Supreme Pontiff"). In the spring of 313 Constantine, together with Licinius, promulgated the Edict of Milan. Through this act he asked all governors of the provinces to stop religious persecutions and the confiscated properties to be immediately returned. The edict did not declare Christianity the official religion of the empire, but it only allowed religious freedom, so that anyone may worship any deity without being persecuted. However, through the Edict of Milan in 313 and the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 emanated by Emperor Theodosius, Christianity ended by becoming a reality first tolerated, and then a constitutive part of the empire. The tradition spread the idea that the Edict of Milan was the act through which tolerance toward the Christian religion was instituted, but Galerius issued an edict of tolerance in 311 as well. [128]

Constantine was far from being a saint; he committed unspeakable atrocities to secure his power, while the Edict of Milan was a political move meant to bring peace within an empire tormented by religious conflicts and to gain the sympathy of his subjects. [129] But, just as Cyrus the Great turned into a messianic model for the Jews, the masses of Christians responded by idolizing Constantine the liberator. They appreciated him, worshiped him, sanctified him and began to celebrate him on the 21st of May. Indeed, the names of great personalities were often surrounded by legends. But the alliance between the church and the imperial institution so grossly altered and exaggerated the image of the emperor that this became an eschatological entity. The Roman emperor turned into the predecessor of Christ's return, while the Roman Empire was no longer an apocalyptic beast, but a barrier against the rise of the Antichrist and a model for the Millennial Kingdom.

This is the prophecy of the messianic emperor.

The legend of *Nero redivivus* boosted the messianization of Constantine as well. The medieval universe was dominated by circularities, proportions and antitheses. Constantine's alleged holiness antagonized Nero's wickedness: Nero persecuted Christians, Constantine supported them; Nero was a Roman emperor, Constantine was also a Roman emperor; and Nero was the forerunner of the Antichrist, while Constantine became the forerunner of Christ.

A pseudo-prophecy in the Roman collection *Libri Sibyllini* , [130] written around 380 and ascribed to the sibyl of the city of Tibur (modern Tivoli), depicted Constantine as a crucial element of the final days: "A king of the Greeks whose name is Constans will rise. He will be the king of the Romans and the Greeks. He will have a tall stature, a beautiful appearance, a glowing face." The reign of this emperor is characterized by great wealth, victory over the enemies of Christendom, the end of paganism and the conversion of the Jews. After he will defeat Gog and Magog "he will come to Jerusalem, and, taking off the tiara from his head and all the imperial clothes off his body, he will let the empire of the Christians to God the Father and to Jesus Christ His Son." [131] In this way the emperor will give free passage to the Antichrist:

> *At that time the prince of injustice, who will be called the "Antichrist," will rise from the tribe of Dan. He will be the Son of Perdition and the culmination of pride, the master of great wonders and signs made through lie. He will deceive many through the art of magic so that he will appear he calls fire from the sky. ... When the Roman Empire will fall, then the Antichrist will show himself and he will sit in the House of God in Jerusalem.* [132]

The prophecy says that the Antichrist will be challenged by the two witnesses of the Apocalypse, Elijah and Enoch, but he will destroy them and he will begin a final persecution against Christians, until "he will be killed through the power of the Lord by Michael the Archangel on the Mount of Olives." [133]

The pseudo-prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl was a source of inspiration for the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. This was written in Syriac toward the

end of the 7th century as a reaction to the Islamic conquests in the Near East and it was falsely ascribed to Methodius of Olympus in order to gain credibility. It depicts well-known Christian eschatological themes: the rise and the reign of the Antichrist, the invasions of Gog and Magog, the great tribulation that precedes the end of the world and the idea of a Roman messianic emperor. [134]

It is interesting that the messianic emperor resembles the Jewish concept of the Messiah and especially the Islamic concept of the Mahdi. The messianic emperor precedes Jesus Christ, the Mahdi precedes Isa; the Messiah is a Jew, the messianic emperor is a Christian, the Mahdi is a Muslim; the Messiah protects Judaism, the messianic emperor protects Christianity, the Mahdi protects Islam; all three are models of religiosity and morality; all three establish earthly kingdoms; and both the messianic emperor and the Mahdi come into contact with the Antichrist. Every subsequent Abrahamic religion took elements from previous ones. Hence, it is safe to conclude that the messianic emperor partially copies the Messiah, while the Mahdi is a combination of these two. The concept of the messianic emperor disappeared from Christianity during the Age of Enlightenment, but the Mahdi has been preserved until today due to the rigidity of Islam.

In the 8th century the presence of the messianic emperor was a necessary condition for the accomplishment of the Christian apocalyptic scenario. But because Constantine died and the final events had not occurred, it was Charlemagne’s turn to assume this role. After he inherited the throne of the Frankish Kingdom, Charlemagne continued to extend his domination in three main directions: south, toward the Italian Peninsula, southwest, toward the Iberian Peninsula, and east, toward the territory of today’s Germany. In Italy he intervened against the Lombards in order to protect the Bishopric of Rome. In Spain he conquered Muslim territories up to the area of Barcelona, and in the eastern campaign he fought the Saxons. In all cases he combined the act of conquering with forced Christianization. Draconian measures were taken against those who, rejecting Charlemagne’s beliefs, were actually rejecting his authority. This is how at the end of the 8th century the Frankish state was a conglomerate of people of different origins and languages (Germanics, Romanics, Slavs). It had all the features of an empire, except for an appropriate name and the traditional coronation of the emperor.

In 795 Pope Leo III made Charlemagne his ally by sending him symbolic gifts and proclaiming him "Protector of the church." Toward the end of the year 800 Charlemagne helped Leo regain the papal chair after he had been dethroned by the revolting Roman nobility. In return, on the 25th of December, on the occasion of the Feast of the Nativity, the pope anointed the Frankish leader, granting him the title of Roman emperor.

The pope's gesture had multiple meanings. First, this was an obvious attempt to revive the Western Roman Empire: Charlemagne received from Leo a title and attributions held only by the veritable Roman emperors in Constantinople. [135] Second, an old ambition of the popes – that of making the Bishopric of Rome a force by separating it from Constantinople – took shape. And third, the coronation of Charlemagne prolonged the identity of the fourth (Roman) empire from Daniel's vision and at the same time it saved the validity of the prophecy. The Western elites had to find an explanation why the Western Roman Empire fell but the end of the world did not come. So, a plausible historical solution was the resuscitation of the Western Roman Empire, which at the same time conveniently removed the image of the Byzantine Empire as the rightful leader of the known world.

After the changing of the empire's capital by Constantine, the Bishopric of Rome theoretically became subordinate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. But over the centuries the relation between the two deteriorated; for instance, at that time the two centers of power had opposite positions regarding the legitimacy of icons. By placing the imperial crown on Charlemagne's head the Bishopric of Rome openly expressed its independence from the Byzantine political and religious apparatus. Leo usurped the prerogatives of the patriarch of Constantinople, while Charlemagne usurped the prerogatives of the Byzantine emperor. [136]

From the point of view of Constantinople Charlemagne's coronation was a great betrayal. But the motives behind the action were not entirely political. Leo and Charlemagne had faith in the millennial week. Alcuin of York, Charlemagne's personal adviser, was familiar with the millenarism of Beatus. [137] He enthusiastically wrote about an *Imperium Christianum* ("Christian Empire"), a theocracy within which people would be united by the Christian religion, "just as the inhabitants of the [Roman Empire] had been united by a

common Roman citizenship." [138] Jerome, Eusebius, Gregory of Tours and Beatus (clergymen such as Leo) – all contended the completion of the 6,000 years from the Creation around the year 800. Besides, in *Commentaria in Apocalypsin* Beatus spoke about Nero returning as the Antichrist. [139] Therefore, given the fact that the Western Roman Empire collapsed and the prophecies indicated that the Antichrist was about to be revealed, someone had to occupy the vacant throne of the messianic emperor.

Charlemagne was anointed emperor only two days after he had helped Leo regain his papal chair. The hurried coronation on the Day of the Nativity seems to be an intentional amplification of the event by creating an invisible connection between the material and the spiritual order. In this way the emperor received the aura of saint. Held on the same day when Heaven celebrated Christ's appearance on the earth and in the same year when the 6,000 years from the creation of the world were completed, Charlemagne's coronation gained a universal dimension, as a turning point in the history of humanity. Charlemagne received the role of the messianic emperor and the sacred mission to revive the Roman Empire. He largely copied the Roman administrative structure and adapted it to the ecclesiastical demands; at least in the final years of reign the government was predominantly theocratic. Charlemagne and Leo also wished to name the union of territories "Roman Empire," but, due the precarious relations with Constantinople, the name remained an uncertain aspect. Historians named it the "Carolingian Empire," after its founder. [140]

3. THE FASCINATION OF THE YEAR 1000

3.1. THE MILLENNIAL WEEK OF THE YEAR 1000: ANNO MUNDI AND ANNO DOMINI

The medieval mindset can hardly be understood from a modern point of view. People fanatically believed in miracles and omens of the end. Superstition and witchcraft were omnipresent. The prelates, the kings, the nobles and the common people were equally corrupt. All the achievements and the failures of society were directly linked to the divine will, which manifested through signs in stars, in air, on earth and in water. The sin was present even in the breathable air, while the cosmic and natural disorders induced veritable phobias and fed superstitions. People believed that the death of heroes, saints, emperors or kings is accompanied by a cortege of unusual phenomena. So, whether or not Judgement Day was to come at the anniversary of 1,000 years from the birth of Christ, God was expected to "celebrate" the end of the millennium by performing important miracles.

The year 1000 revealed a hard truth, which would be experienced by subsequent generations as well: apocalyptic fears often lead to economic disaster. They reconfigure priorities and cancel any long-term plan of social or economic nature. Farming the land, gathering resources or accumulating wealth are insignificant compared to the redemption of the soul, the rise of the Antichrist or the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Besides, for a true Christian the prospect of Parousia was not a reason of fear and terror, but of hope and healing. [141]

Time measurement is only a convention, and throughout history this act suffered countless transformations. Unlike the technological society of the 21st century, in which temporal synchronization is vital, in the 10th century time measurement was a precarious process. The abilities to write, read and calculate – essential for keeping a chronology – were mastered only by a handful of scholars. And, to make things even more complicated, at the end of the 10th century there was not a single European chronological system, but several.

In the first four centuries the Latin chroniclers used around four different methods of dating: the *Ab urbe condita* chronology, which had as point of reference the year of the foundation of the city of Rome and it was mainly used by non-Christian Roman citizens; the imperial chronology, which counted the years according to the reign of an emperor and it was mainly used by civil servants; the consular chronology, which was also used by civil servants, but it kept track of time according to the years of a consul's office; and the chronology of the world's age, which had as point of reference the creation of Adam and it was known in Western Christianity as *Anno Mundi* .

The *Ab urbe condita* system was not favored within Christian circles because it was associated with the rituals and festivals of pagan Rome. Christians preferred instead to use the purely administrative systems of secular reigns or especially the Christian system of the Creation. But the *Anno Mundi* chronology had more disadvantages than advantages. On the one hand, the system of regnal (imperial) and consular years was simple and accessible to less educated people. On the other hand, the *Anno Mundi* system conferred power, conformity and legitimacy to the Christian religion as against other pagan beliefs. But its vagueness, the lack of a consensus and the necessity of advanced knowledge of mathematics were insurmountable obstacles.

Another chronological system that took shape shortly after the fall of the Western Roman Empire was *Anno Domini* (which means "the year of the Lord" and it is abbreviated "AD"). Although the idea of a chronology based on the incarnation of Christ first appeared in the 2nd century, this was put into practice only four centuries later by Dionysius Exiguus, a monk in Scythia Minor (the region of Dobrogea, today's Romania). When Dionysius devised the table with the systematization of the years, he recorded for that year the consulate of Flavius Probus Iunior in Narbonne, the imperial year 240 since Diocletian, the year 1278 since the foundation of Rome and 525 years since the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Dionysius, however, had no interest in millenarism or any opposition toward the *Anno Mundi* system. Rather, he aimed to provide a better system for calculating Easter's date and to erase the imperial chronology that had as point of reference the bloody reign of Diocletian (used in the East by the Church of Alexandria). The date of August 28, 284, the beginning of the reign of Emperor Diocletian, was year 1 in *Anno Diocletiani* . But unlike his contemporary Annianus, who set

the birth of Christ in the year 9 (in the Julian calendar), Dionysius placed it approximately ten years earlier. And he was also the first one who assumed that Christ was aged 33 and three months at the time of the Crucifixion, according to the medieval idea of divine proportions. [142]

There are some problems regarding the chronology of Dionysius Exiguus. First, his chronological work came 300 years before the West imported the number 0 (zero) from the Arabs. Accordingly, his calendar started with the year 1 and not with the year 0. The result was that centuries and millennia are counted from *01 (1001 or 2001) and not from *00 (1000 or 2000). Second, there is no telling what Dionysius meant when he wrote about the Incarnation (of Christ): conception or birth. From the medical point of view, conception and birth are separated by a normal period of nine months, which is an extremely important aspect if the Incarnation is taken as a point of temporal reference for dating subsequent events. And a third major problem is the Gospel of Matthew, which narrates about the massacre of the infants ordered by Herod, the king of Palestine. Josephus says that Herod died in 750 *Ab urbe condita* . [143] This means that he died at least four years before the supposed date of the birth of Jesus, calculated by Dionysius in the year 754 *Ab urbe condita* . Jesus must have been born during Herod's reign, since the latter ordered the killing of the infants less than two years of age. [144] In addition to these problems, consular years started on the 1st of January, the Diocletian year began on the 29th of August, and the historical lists of consuls and of regnal years had many gaps and inconsistencies.

Dionysius was the creator of the *Anno Domini* system, but it became widespread in Western Europe largely due to the Anglo-Saxon historian Bede the Venerable. In *De temporum ratione* (723) Bede described the principles of calculating Easter's date together with a chronology of the world. The study was based on the work of Dionysius, Eusebius, parts of Isidore's *Etymologiae* and some references from Jerome's Bible translation. [145] Unlike Isidore, who dated the Creation in 5210 BC and was seen as an authority in this matter, Bede placed it in 3952 BC. [146]

Bede brought significant improvements to *Anno Domini* chronology. Initially, this system had a major inconvenience: it ignored the years before the Incarnation. The events preceding Christ's life had to be dated by

switching to the *Anno Mundi* system. More precisely, the events of the New Testament could have been dated both in *Anno Domini* and *Anno Mundi* , but the events of the Old Testament were dated only through *Anno Mundi* chronology. Accordingly, in *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (731) Bede completed the *Anno Domini* system through the phrase *ante vero incarnationis dominicae tempus* ("the time before the real incarnation of the Lord"), which later became the English "BC" (Before Christ).

Bede reversed the counting of the years preceding the Incarnation in order to depict the life of Christ as a sort of axis of time, a purpose and a point of reference for the entire existence of the world, past, present and future. There was no year 0 (zero); the year 1 was preceded by the year -1 (which later turned into 1 BC). Bede established that the *Anno Domini* era began at the moment of Christ's incarnation, but the distinction between incarnation and birth became clear only in the 9th century. The Incarnation was once and for all identified with the conception of Christ and it was established on the 25th of March (the date of Annunciation), as it had been previously suggested by the Byzantine monk Annianus. [147]

Anno Domini became dominant in the Latin West until the 10th century, but the Greek East did not use it until modern times. Both Charlemagne and Alcuin of York used it, while Beatus used both systems to determine the end of the 6,000 years in *Commentaria in Apocalypsin* . Dionysius and Bede did not intend to replace the *Anno Mundi* system, but the switch from one system to another was inevitable due to the advantages of the *Anno Domini* system:

(1) The temporal points of reference of both systems were equally important: *Anno Mundi* was temporally related to the birth of Adam, the physical father of humanity, while *Anno Domini* has at its center the incarnation (birth) of Christ, the spiritual father and the savior of the world.

(2) The date and the year of Christ's birth have never been exactly established, but all the estimates range within a period of 30 years; by contrast, the date of the Creation has had variations of hundreds or even thousands of years.

(3) The mathematical values used in the *Anno Domini* system are much lower than those used in the *Anno Mundi* system, and therefore the first is easier to

use.

(4) The *Anno Domini* system successfully replaced the system of regnal years and it conferred a chronological harmony to the entire Christianity. The counting of the regnal years was regional and it restarted every time a new king took the throne. From the Christian point of view, Jesus is the king of the world and his incarnation represents the beginning of the Kingdom of God.

(5) *Anno Domini* was a purely Christian system, while *Anno Mundi* was shared with Judaism. The Jews rejected Christ's divinity, and therefore they had no reason to make a chronology based on his life.

(6) Rome adopted *Anno Domini* chronology in order to reaffirm its religious and political independence from Constantinople, which used the *Etos Kosmou* chronology.

Around the year 1000 both chronologies were used in parallel and fueled the millennial week theory. At that time it became obvious that the early millenarist theories failed. The year 800, the limit for the fulfillment of the 6,000 years according to all calculations, passed uneventfully. This meant that either the doctrine of the millennial week was false or the previous calculations were wrong. The Christians of the year 1000 chose the last variant because they believed that God built the world on the basis of temporal and spatial proportions. According to the French monk Rodulphus Glaber, as the same Creator needed six days to complete his work and in the seventh he rested, in the same way he toiled for more than six thousand years to teach men through miracles. And in the seventh millennium the trials of the world would end and evil would invade it. [148]

3.2. THE RISE OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

In 954 Adson, abbot of Montier-en-Der, concluded *Libellus de Antichristo* , a work addressed in particular to the queen of West Francia and in general to all who were concerned with the issue of the end of the world. Adson advised his contemporaries to maintain calm and peace because, from his point of view, the Antichrist could not appear as long as the Roman Empire was still standing. Adson, however, did not refer to the Byzantine Empire. For the

Western scholars the coronation of Charlemagne and the beginning of the Carolingian dynasty had revived certain political and spiritual structures which were ensuring the continuity of the genuine Roman Empire with the capital in Rome. Better said, Adson assured his queen that, as long as her Carolingian dynasty was reigning, the Carolingian Empire and the Roman Empire were standing and they were preventing the rise of the Antichrist. [149] Indeed, for a current observer such ideas are ridiculous, but the people of the year 1000 treated them with utmost seriousness.

Unfortunately for Adson, the political situation which he relied on in his arguments changed dramatically until the end of the millennium. After the death of Charlemagne in 814 the Carolingian Empire was progressively divided into three regions: West Francia (France), East Francia (Germany) and Middle Francia (Northern and Central Italy). At first, each of these regions was led by representatives of the Carolingian dynasty. But in 954, when *Libellus de Antichristo* was written, the Carolingian dynasty was ruling only in West Francia, which made Adson remark that "the Roman empire [is] almost completely destroyed." [150] And three decades later, in 987, Louis V the Carolingian died without leaving heirs, which led to the enthronement of Hugh Capet and the beginning of the Capetian dynasty. So, for any reader of Adson's work the future looked grim: central authority was decomposing in West Francia and the death of Louis V and the end of the Carolingian dynasty cleared the path for the coming of the Antichrist.

Things stood differently in Middle and Eastern Francia, where the Ottonian dynasty attempted to create a historical linearity by reviving the Roman Empire. After he took the power from the Carolingian dynasty, Otto I arranged the coronation ceremony to be held in Aachen, the former capital of Charlemagne, he was anointed by the archbishop of Mainz, the supreme authority of the German church, he largely copied the structure and organization of the Carolingian Empire, he adopted many titles previously held by Charlemagne, and he started to conquer the same territories. [151] Furthermore, just as Pope Leo III asked for Charlemagne's help and he offered the imperial crown in return, in the same way Pope John XII asked Otto's protection and anointed him emperor in February 962. Otto named his territories the "Holy Roman Empire" (Latin: *Sacrum Romanum Imperium*) and ten days after the coronation the pope and the new emperor ratified the

document *Diploma Ottonianum* . Through this, Otto, like Charlemagne, became the guarantor of the independence and security of the Papal States. [152] Added to the name "Roman Empire," the word "Holy" reveals the basis of the new organism: the Christian religion. In the records of the time the coronation of Otto I was called *translatio imperii* (the "imperial transfer") – a concept taken from the succession of power between the empires in Daniel's vision. As God transferred the power from the Babylonians to the Medo-Persians, then to the Greek-Macedonians, and ultimately to the Romans, in the same way the power, the purpose and the authority of the former Roman Empire were transferred to the Holy Roman Empire. The German emperors followed the line opened by Charlemagne and considered themselves direct successors of the genuine Roman emperors. They adopted the title of "kaiser" (derived from the Latin word *caesar*), while later the Russian emperors took the title of "tsar" because Russia was considered the successor of the Byzantine Empire. [153]

It was not clear, however, if the Holy Roman Empire was a continuation of the former Roman Empire, or it was the fulfillment of the fifth and the last empire from Daniel's vision, which would never be destroyed and would bring the end of the world. The German chronicler Otto of Freising preferred the last variant and said that all human power had its origin in the East, but is destined to end in the West. Hugh of Saint Victor had a more interesting theory: God ordained the universal government to begin in the East and gradually extend toward the West. So, the end of the world would come when the course of events would reach the edge of the Universe. [154]

The main goal of the Ottonian dynasty was to walk in the footsteps of the former Western emperors, but Otto III was downright fanatical. In 996 he helped his cousin Bruno of Carinthia become Pope Gregory V, the first German pope. In returning the favor, the new pontiff crowned Otto III emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in Rome in May 996. Influenced by his Byzantine mother and his advisers Gerbert of Aurillac and Adalbert of Prague, Otto III projected the formation of a theocratic empire formed from the union of the Papacy, Rome and Byzantium. Within this imaginary empire the emperor held the administrative, military, juridical and even the religious supremacy. He made Rome the administrative center of his empire, he assigned himself the titles of "Servant of Jesus Christ" or "Emperor of the

World," and he introduced Roman and Byzantine court ceremonies as steps toward standardization.

The medieval leaders also felt that it was their duty to enlarge the borders of Christianity and to gather all nations (through force if necessary) under the sign of the cross according to the prophecies. Otto III sent his closest prelates to Christianize the barbaric regions of Europe. Adalbert, bishop of Prague, had the task to bring Christ into Poland, while Bruno, bishop of Augsburg, took the path to Hungary. [155] When Pope Gregory V died in 999, Otto III arranged for Gerbert of Aurillac to become Pope Sylvester II. The papal name was not random: it was a direct reference to Sylvester I (pope between 314 and 335), who used the title of "pope" for the first time and created the "Christian Empire" together with Constantine the Great. [156]

Between 998 and 1000 Otto III ceaselessly visited hermits and made many pilgrimages. In the first half of the Middle Ages a legend said that an emperor would wake up from sleep in order to fight the Antichrist; so the emperor exhumed the body of Charlemagne in the year 1000 at Pentecost. [157] And, like Charlemagne, he sent the bishop of Milan to Constantinople for the hand of a Byzantine princess as a step toward imperial unification. But Otto III died in 1002, much too soon for his project to become reality. [158]

3.3. THE FEARS OF 1000 AND 1033

Roughly, two periods of apocalyptic fear can be distinguished at the transition between the millennia: the period between 950 and 1000, and the period between 1000 and 1033. At first, people feared year 1000 because it marked the completion of a millennium since two major religious events: the Savior's conception and birth. But, after the year 1000 passed without bringing major changes in the world, believers focused their attention toward the year 1033. Unlike 1000, the year 1033 marked the completion of a millennium since three major religious events: the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Besides, the angels speak about the ascension and the Second Coming of Jesus, not about his birth and his return (Acts 1:10-12). As Rodulphus Glaber said, if the end of the world was not going to take place, 1000 and 1033 at least had to host extraordinary signs:

After the many prodigies which had broken upon the world before, after,

and around the millennium of the Lord Christ, there were plenty of able men of penetrating intellect who foretold others, just as great, at the approach of the millennium of the Lord's Passion, and such wonders were soon manifest. [159]

The fundamental problems of the generation of the year 1000 were the lack of information and the extremely precarious understanding of the Universe. In the Middle Ages there was no such thing as hazard; unusual events or coincidences could not simply happen because the divine will was the source of absolutely everything that existed and manifested. History served no other purpose than to boost the meditation of believers, to increase their vigilance and to emphasize God's messages. [160] Monks in the region of Lotharingia said that the end would come in 970, when important biblical events coincided on the same calendrical date: Friday the 25th of March. According to tradition, on this date Adam was created, Isaac was sacrificed, the Red Sea was crossed by the Israelites, Christ incarnated, Christ was crucified and, it was believed, Michael the Archangel would kill the Beast. When the coincidence occurred again in 1065, the bishop of Bamberg led a great pilgrimage to Jerusalem, fearing that the day in question would bring Final Judgment. [161]

In 996, in a letter addressed to King Robert, the French monk Abbo of Fleury writes about an event from his youth that can be dated around the year 975:

Also, regarding the end of the world, as an adolescent I heard a sermon preached before the populace in the church at Paris: the Antichrist should arrive straight-way, with the number of one thousand years having been completed, and the universal judgment should follow not long after that time. I resisted this prophecy, to the extent that I was able, from the Gospels and the Apocalypse and the Book of Daniel. Then my abbot, Richard of blessed memory, with a keen mind warden off an error that arose regarding the end of the world. After that, he ordered me to respond to a letter that he received from the Lotharingians; for the rumor had filled nearly the whole world that when the Annunciation fell upon Good Friday, it would without doubt be the end of the world. [162]

In 980 the bishop of Auxerre wrote that the Magyars invaders were believed to be Gog and Magog: "For they say that this is the last time of the age, and

the end of the world is near, and therefore the Hungarians are Gog and Magog. Never were they heard of before; but now, behold, it is the end of time, and they have materialized." [163]

In Britain, one of the *Blickling Homilies* , the largest collection of anonymous Anglo-Saxon homilies written in Old English, said that in the year 971 the 1,000 years were close to completion and most signs of Judgment Day were fulfilled. From 990 until 1010 the homilies of Aelfric and Wulfstan made explicit references to the year 1000, the unleashing of the Beast and Final Judgment, [164] while between 992 and 1002 the chronicler Nouaillé started his documents with the phrase "As the world is approaching now to the end." [165] The German chronicles mentioned about light similar to the Sun coming from the north and rumors about three suns, three moons and three stars fighting (a widespread story); these signaled that a great calamity was about to fall upon the world. As well, around 994 the birth of a child with malformations described as monstrous, famine and a high level of mortality in Saxony are described by chroniclers as apocalyptic signs. [166]

Around 1010 the Anglo-Saxon monk Wulfstan refuses to be discouraged by the failure of the year 1000: "A thousand years and more have now passed since Christ... and now Satan's bonds are extremely loose, and Antichrist's time near at hand, and therefore the longer it is in the world, the weaker it becomes." [167] Instead, the monk Byhrtferth, Abbo of Fleury's disciple, notes in 1011 that although "John says 'after 1000 years Satan shall be released (Revelation 20:7),' the year 1000 is already accomplished according to human numeration, but it is the power of the Savior when he shall bring it to an end." [168] In 1025, under the guidance of William of Volpiano, Glaber begins to write a history of the world in which the year 1000 is a central point. [169] Instead, Adémar of Chabannes conceived a history of the world focused on recording the apocalyptic signs and miracles beginning with the year 1010. [170]

Celestial phenomena were the traditional companions of extraordinary mundane events. In August 989 Halley's Comet appeared for a couple of weeks spreading panic and awe among the faithful. [171] Likewise, in May 1006 the supernova [172] SN 1006, the brightest in history, appeared in the sky for a couple of weeks and caused horror. [173] In 1009 and 1028 the letters of

Duke William, King Robert, Gauzlin of Fleury and Fulbert of Chartres talked about a rain of blood on the shore of Aquitania, about the Sun that turned red and lost its brightness for three years, and the death that followed. In the summer of 1014 another heavenly sign, probably a comet, appeared for a couple of nights and it generated panic. Accidentally, in the same period in the region of Gaul and Italy cities, castles and monasteries were destroyed by fire, and these disasters were related to the heavenly appearance. [174]

The scariest phenomena were solar eclipses. In 968 the soldiers of Otto I panicked at the sight of a solar eclipse, while the chronicler Sigebert of Gembloux details the impact of the eclipse of June 29, 1033:

> *In the same year in which a thousand years from the crucifixion of the Lord were fulfilled, in the third day of the calends of July, on a Friday, in the 28th day of the month, an eclipse or a darkness of the Sun occurred, that lasted from the sixth hour of that day till the eighth hour and it was really frightening. The Sun became blue like sapphire, and in the upper part the firmament was carrying the image of the Moon in its first quarter. People, looking at each other, saw themselves pale like dead. All things seemed enveloped in a saffron-like color. And then a stupor and an immense fear invaded their hearts. The sight, as they well figured out, foreshadowed a horrible plague that was about to fall over the people. [175]*

The signs of the end manifested themselves to all levels, even in the microcosm. The epidemics of the end of the millennium were incomparably milder than the 6th-century smallpox epidemic or the 14th-century plague epidemic. But the generation of the year 1000 did not know history; it only knew that the material disorder was a divine punishment for the spiritual disorder. So, diseases were not medically analyzed and treated, but religiously:

> *At that time, a terrible plague raged among people, a hidden fire that, if it attacked a limb, was devouring it by separating it from the body; most were, in one night, completely consumed by this horrible burning. The cure against this terrifying plague was found in the memories of numerous saints; the mob crowded especially into the churches of the three holy confessors, ... there they found, through their benefits, the*

desired healing. [176]

And there was also famine; so severe that it pushed the people to cannibalism. If anyone thinks that living in the 21st century is tough, Glaber's accounts will make him change his mind:

> *In the time that followed, famine began to extend its ravages on almost the entire earth and people let themselves be seized by the fear that the entire human species might disappear. Weather conditions were so unfavorable that man could not find even a moment suitable for planting and, especially, due to floods, could not gather his harvest. It was justly said that the hostile elements declared war on men, and there is no doubt that they were set to punish their disobedience. ... And yet, after they ate all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, men, clenched by a devouring hunger, began to gather carrions and other horrible things, which cause disgust only by mentioning them. Many, to escape death, feed themselves with forest roots and water grasses, but in vain: the only cure to soften God's hatred was the withdrawal in oneself. Finally, nausea overcomes you only if you hear about the vices that ruled the human race at that time. Alas! Rare thing heard over time, the savage starvation pushed people to eat human flesh. Travelers were kidnapped by those stronger than them, chopped, boiled and eaten. Many people, wandering from one place to another, dislodged by hunger, stopped, in their way, at a more welcoming house, but at night they were killed and used as food for those who housed them. Many, luring children with an egg or an apple, allured them in desert places, where they slaughtered them and feasted on them. Their dead bodies, pulled out from the earth, were also fit to satisfy the hunger. This kind of madness took such a large scale that the animals left without owner were less threatened by kidnappers than people. ... The order of the seasons and of the elements, sovereign from the beginning until the last centuries, was believed to go back forever into chaos and this was the end of the human species.* [177]

The Middle Ages were the golden age of superstition. People desperately searched for a physical contact with the supernatural to reinforce their beliefs. Miracles were often associated with sacred objects such as relics, icons or

biblical scrap items (nails or fragments of the cross of Christ). These were seen as weapons against the devil and a help in preserving faith. The people's desire to possess relics encouraged the creation of forgeries and legends. In France John the Baptist's head was allegedly discovered at Angely, [178] a piece from the rod of Moses was revealed at Sans, [179] and in 1024 the classic "letters from Heaven," [180] through which God called the world to peace and atonement, appeared in the northern regions. [181]

Compared to the West, the East had plenty of sacred objects, which further motivated the pilgrimage toward the Holy Land. Throughout the Middle Ages the pilgrimage was often understood as a preparation for death, a promise of redemption. The usual pilgrim, who left the house, separating himself from his family, abandoning any protection, and freeing himself from any affection, was leaving toward the other side. The pilgrimage was a profane death, a separation from the world before the separation from the body and the ascension to the godly affairs. It was a major penitential practice, a trial that exposed the pilgrim to the dangers of an adventure and, as in the case of the Hebrew nation, it led him to the Promised Land. The main purpose of the journey was not necessarily reaching the destination, but the heading toward Jerusalem. For the common pilgrim there was no coming back. So, his real hope was to find his death on the road or, ideally, in Jerusalem. [182]

In the vicinity of the years 1000 and 1033 the view regarding pilgrimage changed: it was no longer a preparation for death, but for life. The clumps of pilgrims described by Adémar – himself taking the path to Jerusalem [183] – prove that now the pilgrim had to fight to reach the destination. Previously, the fatal obstacles had been seen as God's will; now they turned into the works of Satan designed to obstruct the redemption of the believers. They had to overcome the devil's traps in order to be in front of God at the moment of his appearance above Jerusalem:

> *Many people went to seek the advice of certain men, the most concerned of their time, about the significance of such a great outpouring of crowds to Jerusalem, as no previous century had ever seen; these ones responded, fitting their words, that it foreshadowed nothing else than the coming of that bastard Antichrist who, at the approaching of the*

world's end we have to, according to the confession of the divine power, expect to see him appearing on the earth. All these nations were heading to the East, where the Antichrist is supposed to rise, because at that time all the nations must go to meet him. [184]

Parousia could have been either a day of wrath or a day of joy. For the oppressed it was a day of deliverance; the earthly suffering would have been repaid with a seat at the rich table of Christ. Instead, for the oppressors who did not repent it was a day of wrath. According to an English text from 1011, all the injustices committed by the privileged classes were going to be repaid with eternal damnation: "then will end the tyranny of kings and the injustice and rapine of reeves and their cunning and unjust judgments and wiles. Then shall those who rejoiced and were glad in this life groan and lament." [185]

The day of the Lord was a day of wrath especially for heretics. On the one hand there were those who, more or less, challenged the religious establishment; in this regard Adémar of Chabannes exaggerated a trivial burning at the stake: "Shortly after the year 1017, in Aquitania appeared the Manichaeists who deceived the people. ... They were the messengers of the Antichrist and took out many from the orbit of faith." [186] On the other hand there were the Jews, Satan's traditional allies, who spread the plague of sin and heresy through their simple presence: [187]

One day, on Good Friday, after the adoration of the cross, Rome was shaken by an earthquake and by a furious gale. And immediately, a Jew announced the pope that, at that very hour, the Jews in synagogues were about to deride the image of the crucifix. Benedict, after a careful inquiry, convinced of the truth of the charge, condemned the perpetrators to death for this infamy. The fury of the winds ceased immediately after their decapitation. [188]

But in all miracles and signs, good or evil, there was the almighty hand of God. Hardship was necessary. Its apparent purpose was to poison the mind and to alienate man from God. However, its profound purpose, the one understood only by a few, was to urge to penitence, to remind people of the right path. The year 1000 was an occasion for the examination of the heart: the increasing number of heresies was related by Glaber to the untying of Satan, [189] while the flagellants whipped their bodies harder, to the point

when penitence turned macabre. There was an increase in donations to the church as well. Rich and poor, nobles and peasants, idiots and elevated – every social class contributed to the increase of the church's wealth. The abandonment of worldly things meant that the buildings were no longer repaired, the lands were left uncultivated, criminals were set free and armies of pilgrims headed toward the Holy Land to witness the return of Christ.

4. THE APOCALYPSES OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE MIDDLE AGES

4.1. ISLAMOPHOBIA

The most important apocalyptic manifestations and theories of the first millennium were tied to the fate of the Roman Empire. But, after the failure of the years 1000 and 1033 and the Great Schism between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, the concept of the revived Roman Empire was gradually abandoned. The same thing happened with the relation between Nero [190] and the Antichrist and the concept of the millennial week. As knowledge developed and prophecies failed, initial theories were discarded, sometimes only to be replaced by others. In any case, in the 11th century the schism between Rome and Constantinople and the rise of Islam changed the religious and apocalyptic paradigm. From this moment on the Western apocalypticism was divided into two main themes: the Muslim threat and the call to ecclesiastical reform due to the corruption of the clergy.

Christians came into contact with the religion of Muhammad in the 7th and 8th centuries in the Orient and then in Northern Africa and the Iberian Peninsula. The Christian views regarding Islam varied; it was not clear the role this new and powerful religion was going to play in the final days. But, due to the fact that Islam denies Christ's divinity same as Judaism does, they all had negative connotations. This is the beginning of "Islamophobia."

In those times – whether we speak of Jews, Christians or Muslims – everybody was exaggerating when it came to divine affairs. As far as Christians were concerned, they fabricated texts to demonize Muslims and to depict the satanic origin of Islam. One example in this regard was the

Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephraem, a 7th-century Syriac text which depicts the events in the Middle East and the expansion of Muslims in a catastrophic light. [191] The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephraem circulated in two versions: in Syriac and in Latin. In the Syriac version Muslims prepare the appearance of the Jewish Antichrist:

> *A people will emerge from the wilderness, the progeny of Hagar, the handmaid of Sarah; who hold fast to the covenant with Abraham, The husband of Sarah and Hagar. Set in motion, he (Ishmael) comes in the name of the ram, the herald of the Son of Destruction. ... He will rebuild and establish himself in Zion, and will make himself to be God and enter into the sanctuary to take a seat In accordance with what the Apostle wrote to us. The Jews will take pride in him; they will prepare themselves and come to him. ... He will affect all the wonders Which Our Lord performed within the created order, Except that he will not be able to resurrect the dead, for he will not have authority over (the) spirits (of the dead).* *[192]*

The Latin version of the text is newer and considerably different from the Syriac one. Most likely its anonymous author was influenced by the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. The Latin version focuses on demonizing the Jews:

> *When the Roman Empire begins to be consumed by the sword, the coming of the Evil One is at hand. It is necessary that the world come to an end at the completion of the Roman Empire. In those days two brothers will come to the Roman Empire who will rule with one mind; but because one will surpass the other, there will be a schism between them. And so the Adversary will be loosed and will stir up hatred between the Persian and Roman empires. In those days many will rise up against Rome; the Jewish people will be her adversaries. ... When therefore the end of the world comes, that abominable, lying and murderous one is born from the tribe of Dan. He is conceived from the seed of a man and from an unclean or most vile virgin, mixed with an evil or worthless spirit. ... Therefore, when he receives the kingdom, he orders the temple of God to be rebuilt for himself, which is in Jerusalem; who, after coming into it, he shall sit as God and order that*

he be adored by all nations ... Then the Jews shall congratulate him, because he gave them again the practice of the first covenant; then all people from everywhere shall flock together to him at the city of Jerusalem, ... And when the three and a half years have been completed, the time of the Antichrist, through which he will have seduced the world, after the resurrection of the two prophets, in the hour which the world does not know, and on the day which the enemy of son of perdition does not know, will come the sign of the Son of Man. [193]

The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius was written in Syriac, sometime in the 7th century, also as a reaction to the Muslim expansion in the Middle East:

And when the kingdom of the Hebrews was brought to nought, the sons of Ismael, son of Hagar, contended with Rome in its stead, whom Daniel calls seed of the South [194] *... in this last millennium, which is the seventh, that is brought to nought the kingdom of the Persians and that the sons of Ismael will depart out from the desert of Jethrib [Medina].* [195]

Such stories modeled Christian medieval culture by fueling an attitude of hostility toward Islam. The mass pilgrimages of the years 1000 and 1033 amplified the contacts between Muslims and Christians and sharpened the clash between civilizations. [196] All the hate and fear Christians had for the biblical character of the Antichrist was channeled toward Muslims. And after hundreds of years of tension and conflicts, at the end of the 11th century a mere spark was enough to ignite a political and military reaction as history had never seen before: the crusades.

4.1.1. The First Crusade

The crusades were a series of military and religious campaigns carried out by a good part of Catholic Europe, especially by Frankish kings and Holy Roman emperors. The crusades were a reaction to the Muslim conquest of the Near East at the time of the Rashidun Caliphate. Their purpose was to restore the Christian control over Jerusalem and Antioch (regions generically called the “Kingdom of Heaven”). The crusades were carried out over a period of approximately 200 years, between 1095 and 1291. However, crusading campaigns were also carried out in Spain and Eastern Europe until the 15th

century against the pagan Slavs, the Jews, the Mongols, the Cathars, the Hussites, the Waldensians and other political enemies of the Papacy.

Since the rise of Islam, Christians constantly lost territories to the new religion. When the crusade was preached for the first time, Muslims had already conquered the largest part of the Middle East, Northern Africa and the Iberian Peninsula. Islam threatened to destroy the Byzantine Empire and to invade the old continent. On the other side of the barricade, the idea of a unitary offensive formed from the combined efforts of Christian nations meant to free Jerusalem and to secure pilgrimage routes was not new. But until the end of the 11th century there had not been an initiator and a favorable political context.

The First Crusade was the longest, the most intense and the only one to achieve its intended goals. The immediate cause of the First Crusade was the call for help of the Byzantine emperor Alexios I to Pope Urban II at the Council of Piacenza in 1095. Previously, in 1071, the Byzantine Empire was defeated by the Seljuk Turks at the Battle of Manzikert and it lost almost the entire territory of Asia Minor. Although attempts at reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church failed, the call of the Byzantine emperor and the idea of a crusade were welcomed by the pope. Not only did Alexius humiliate himself in front of the pope through his request for help, but a crusade also had the potential of bringing the Middle East under the control of the Papacy.

In July 1095 Urban went to France to recruit men for the expedition. His journeys culminated with the Council of Clermont in November, where, in front of a large audience of French nobles and clerics, he offered an ardent sermon. There are several versions of Urban's speech, [197] all written after the crusade, and each insists on certain aspects. Only the version of Guibert, abbot of Nogent, used apocalyptic elements:

> *For it is clear that Antichrist is to do battle not with the Jews, not with the Gentiles; but, according to the etymology of his name, he will attack Christians. And if Antichrist finds there no Christians (just as at present when scarcely any dwell there), no one will be there to oppose him, or whom he may rightly overcome. According to Daniel and Jerome, the interpreter of Daniel, he is to fix his tents on the Mount of Olives; and it*

is certain, for the apostle teaches it, that he will sit at Jerusalem in the Temple of the Lord, as though he were God. And according to the same prophet, he will first kill three kings of Egypt, Africa, and Ethiopia, without doubt for their Christian faith. This, indeed, could not at all be done unless Christianity was established where now is paganism. If, therefore, you are zealous in the practice of holy battles, in order that, just as you have received the seed of knowledge of God from Jerusalem, you may in the same way restore the borrowed grace, so that through you the Catholic name may be advanced to oppose the perfidy of the Antichrist and the Antichristians ... These times, most beloved brothers, will now, forsooth, be fulfilled, provided the might of the pagans be repulsed through you, with the co-operation of God. With the end of the world already near, even though the Gentiles fail to be converted to the Lord (since according to the apostle there must be a withdrawal from the faith), it is first necessary, according to the prophecy, that the Christian sway be renewed in those regions, either through you, or others, whom it shall please God to send before the coming of Antichrist, so that the head of all evil, who is to occupy there the throne of the kingdom, shall find some support of the faith to fight against him. Consider, therefore, that the Almighty has provided you, perhaps, for this purpose, that through you He may restore Jerusalem from such debasement. Ponder, I beg you, how full of joy and delight our hearts will be when we shall see the Holy City restored with your little help, and the prophet's, nay divine, words fulfilled in our times. *[198]*

The pope depicted the crusade as the apocalyptic war between two religions and promised to those who would die in the process the forgiveness of sins. For any God-fearing man this was an irresistible opportunity to escape from the eternal punishment of Hell. Urban's speech had an incredible impact on the audience, best illustrated in the version of Robert the Monk: "When Pope Urban had said these and very many similar things in his urbane discourse, he so influenced to one purpose the desires of all who were present, that they cried out, 'It is the will of God! It is the will of God!'" [199] The people took death oaths that they would deliver the Holy Sepulcher, they thronged to kiss the hand of the pope and his representative, and they stitched on their chest a cross to signal that they had become "soldiers of the Church."

The crusade was perceived in many ways, depending on the intellectual, religious or social background of every individual. For some, including the pope, the crusade was a purely experimental military expedition, a gamble that could bring riches and political power. For others, gullible or religious fanatics, the crusade had a cosmic dimension; they associated it with the gathering of nations for the final battle at Armageddon. For others, poor or tormented by feelings of guilt, the crusade was a great opportunity for escaping the hardships of everyday life or for the forgiveness of sins. And last but not least, for impostors such as Peter the Hermit from Amiens the crusade was a good occasion for gaining power and money.

In *Alexiad* (1148), Anna Comnena, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexios I, says that prior to 1069 Peter the Hermit made a pilgrimage alone to the Holy Land. There he was captured by the Turks and subjected to degrading treatments and horrible tortures. Abused and shamefully returned home, Peter the Hermit sought opportunity for revenge. It is not clear if he was present at the Council of Clermont, but it is certain that Peter the Hermit was the most ardent and popular promoter of the crusade in the French regions. Comnena describes him as stubborn, charismatic and a powerful orator, who did not hesitate using others to reach his goals. [200] He had the appearance of a shabby old man, dressed extremely simple, without ever wearing shoes and living only on fish and wine. He traveled large distances on the back of a donkey, and when he preached he carried a huge cross, imitating Christ taunted by sinners. He also lied that Christ revealed himself to him at the Holy Sepulcher and that he possessed a letter from Heaven in which it was written that God had given him power, glory and protection. [201]

The pope’s audience was formed mainly of clerics and nobles with military and financial resources. After his call, the nobles retreated to their places to prepare themselves. The official march was set to start on August 15, 1096. But, due to the propaganda of Peter the Hermit and other charismatic figures, an unexpected number of people left on their own a few months earlier. The answer was beyond expectations: instead of a couple thousand organized knights, Jerusalem became the destination of a veritable migration of over 40,000 crusaders, most of them ordinary men, including women and children. [202]

In order to make the crusade more appealing, the Council of Clermont freed

the crusaders of any taxation, serfs were allowed to leave the land they were bound to, prisoners were released, death sentences were commuted, or the debtors who enrolled in the campaign could no longer be chased by their creditors. In addition, many years before 1096 the population was affected by thirst, famine and diseases, and thus many of them saw the crusade as an opportunity to free themselves of these difficulties. Accordingly, the first forces that headed east were not armies, but crowds of undisciplined people, untrained and without any experience of war. Driven by euphoria, the hordes of peasants did not wait for the professional armies of knights to lead the way, but they left without provisions or weapons. On their own or under the guidance of a charismatic figure, the first crusaders had no idea where they were going. In fact, many of them were people with a bad reputation, outcasts of society, charlatans, thieves, beggars, loiterers, prostitutes, adventurers, fugitives or ex-convicts – Europe's offscourings. Looting and destroying while on the move, they were nothing but a swarm of scoundrels. [203]

The instantaneity and amplitude of the movement had a very interesting effect on the crowds of illiterates. The crusade – a concept never experienced before – created a psychological unity that gave the impression of a miracle; this holy adventure was assembled not by the pope, but by God himself. As the nation of Israel was called to battle by God through the voice of the prophets, in the same way the nations of Europe were summoned to the crusade through the voice of the pope. For Robert the Monk the crusade was a sign of divine intervention comparable to the Creation or Christ's sacrifice on the cross, while for Guibert of Nogent the crusaders imitated and even surpassed the Israelites of the Old Testament, on many occasions called to fight in the name of God. [204] The crusaders compared themselves to the 70 apostles of Jesus (after the Ascension), who traveled without stick, without money and without provisions of water and food. From beggars to nobles, or from idiots (some worshiped a goose believed to be full of the Holy Spirit [205) to scholars, few people were able to resist the temptation of being part of something huge, something that was out of this world. And charismatic figures such as Peter the Hermit offered exactly this chance. This was the People's Crusade, the first part of the First Crusade.

Theoretically, the crusade, or better said the idea of the crusade, was envisioned as a holy war meant to bring the Holy Land under Christian

control. Practically, the crusades proved to be a heavy slap on Christ's face. Preaching the holy war inevitably revived anti-Semitic sentiments. The Jews and Muslims were equally perceived as a threat to Christianity. But the Jews not only were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, but they were also at hand. A part of the crusaders thought that there was no need to travel great distances in order to fight the infidels because they were close to their homes. The belief that the Jews must convert to Christianity before the end of the world and the image of the Jewish people as the incubator of the Antichrist were sufficient to start pogroms.

The crusaders might have committed anti-Semitic actions due to the need for money as well. Western Christianity banned the interest on loans, and thus the poor Christian knights had to borrow money from Jewish moneylenders in order to obtain the necessary equipment: weapons, food and horses. Finding themselves armed by assuming debt, the crusaders conveniently rationalized the killing of the Jews as an extension of their divine mission and as a great contribution to the success of the campaign. Godfrey of Bouillon, the leader of the Princes' Crusade, swore that he would not join the crusade until he avenged the blood of Christ by shedding that of the Jews. [206] Similarly, the chronicler Sigebert of Gembloux wrote that before the beginning of a war in the name of God the Jews must be converted, and those who resist must be dispossessed of their goods, massacred and banished from cities. [207]

Urban said nothing about the Jews when he preached the crusade, and later he condemned any violence against them. The Holy Roman emperor took the same position, but the orders were ignored. [208] Convinced that they were fulfilling a divine purpose, the gangs of crusaders feared nothing and no one. Count Emicho, another famous impostor, said that Christ had promised him the crown of emperor and that he would help him convert the Jews of Europe if he joined the crusade. In the summer of 1096, Emicho's horde, which numbered approximately 10,000 men, crossed the German regions converting through force and massacring anyone who resisted. At Speyer they killed 12 Jews, at Worms around 800 and at Mainz almost 1,000. [209] By contrast, Peter the Hermit preferred extortion, forcing the German Jews pay in exchange for their life. [210]

The crusaders' excesses and their chaotic movement irremediably stigmatized the concept of crusade. From France to Constantinople the crowds of crusaders suffered continuous transformations of organization, quantity and quality. Some tried to reach the destination as soon as possible, others did not know the way and went on detour routes, others tried to loot whatever they could, while certain groups decided to depart a couple of weeks after the first ones arrived at Constantinople. Never before in the history of mankind was there a mass of people, virtually leaderless, moving in unison due to an idea. Entire families, from grandparents to children, joined this wild expedition in a total disorder. Like swarms of locusts, they moved and fed, literally, on the regions where they passed, leaving behind total devastation. Many died on the road because of starvation, disease, fatigue, or by the sword of the natives. It is hard to imagine a group of people less suitable for the task of waging a holy war in God's name, because the organization, the attitude and the actions of the crusaders were anything but holy.

Although he promised that his followers were under divine protection, Peter the Hermit left the German city of Cologne (Köln) in April 1096 accompanied by 40,000 people and reached Constantinople at the end of July with 30,000 men, women and children. Approximately 10,000 failed in their journey outside the jurisdiction of the Catholic Church. His group joined the pilgrims of Walter Sans-Avoir, camping all around Constantinople until August, when they managed to cross the Bosphorus on the Asian shore aided by the Byzantine emperor.

The first groups of crusaders were slaughtered by the Seljuk Turks on the plain of Nicaea. A few were made slaves, while the dead were piled into a ghastly pyramid in order to offer a silent greeting to the following waves of invaders. [211] Those who managed to flee, including Peter the Hermit, returned to Constantinople in the winter of 1096-1097. The survivors of the People's Crusade had no choice but to wait for the professional armies. They joined the Princes' Crusade in May 1097 and, together with the organized armies of knights, they marched through Asia Minor.

The crusader had the feeling that he contributed to the salvation of the world and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. He literally took the cross of Christ and followed him not only to the earthly Jerusalem, but also to the

heavenly one, the land flowing with milk and honey. Leaving behind the sinful land of Europe, the crusaders entered the realm of prodigiousness and of spiritual and material blessings. Not surprisingly at all, as they approached the holy places they got “proofs” that the crusade was the subject of God’s benevolence and control. The occurrence on the night sky of comets, auroras or falling stars, most of them due to an intense solar activity, strengthened the faith and lifted up the morale of the crusaders. And there were also the relics, which went hand in hand with the hallucinations caused by starvation. On June 10, 1098, when Christians were besieged at Antioch by the Ottomans and were running low on morale, the monk Peter Bartholomew had visions of Saint Andrew, who told him that the Holy Lance – with which Jesus was pierced – had been buried within the city. Another monk, Stephen of Valence, claimed he had visions of Christ and the Virgin Mary. After they dug in the Church of Saint Peter on the 15th of June without finding anything, Peter Bartholomew took an ordinary spear and presented it as the Holy Lance. [212] Peter then had a second vision, which urged the crusaders, already starving, to fast for five days, after which they would prevail. During the battle with the Ottomans they had visions of armies of angels fighting alongside them. The crusaders won the battle indeed, but the real reasons behind the victory were the plots and deliberate desertions in the Muslim army. [213]

In the following year, in front of the walls of Jerusalem, the morale of the crusaders was raised by the priest Peter Desiderius. His visions urged the crusaders to fast for three days, and then to march around Jerusalem barefoot. The city was about to fall in nine days, like the biblical example of Joshua at the siege of the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-20). Even though they were already starving, the crusaders fasted, and on the 8th of July they made a procession which ended on the Mount of Olives. [214]

After the conquest of Jerusalem – occasion on which the crusaders committed an unimaginable massacre [215] – the new patriarch, Arnulf of Chocques, claimed that he discovered a piece of the cross of Christ. On the 10th of August, at the Battle of Ascalon, at the head of the crusader army was Arnulf, who carried the piece of the Holy Cross, while Raymond of Aguilers carried the relic of the Holy Lance discovered at Antioch. [216] Carrying relics in battles imitated the Hebrew people and the Ark of the Covenant, which

shows that the crusaders saw holy relics as some sort of weapons. An army equipped with a holy relic was believed to be invincible because it had divine support.

Until the 15th century the Holy Land was the target of numerous other expeditions meant to strengthen or to restore the Christian control in Asia Minor. But no other crusade has ever enjoyed popularity as the First Crusade, and no other crusade has ever succeeded in achieving its goals. The crusades were extremely costly campaigns. So, as Europe got more and more exhausted, the expeditions became increasingly rare. The idea of crusade was distorted and crusades were carried out even within Europe, against pagan or heretic groups. Only the demonization of the enemy, the persecution of the Jews and especially God's miraculous intervention remained constant features of the crusades.

4.1.2. The demonization of Muhammad

Muhammad was a man of his time and he did what most men did during those times. According to the *hadiths* , he killed, he had multiple wives, he molested his wives, he slept with a nine-year old girl, he raped women, he beheaded his enemies, he owned slaves, he looted and plundered, he preached hate for other religions or he forced people to convert to his religion. [217] He was neither a saint, hero, visionary or perfect man as Muslims tend to portray him, nor Satan's acolyte as he was depicted by medieval Christians. By modern standards, Muhammad was a savage.

Christianity gained additional information about Muhammad in the 11th century due to the First Crusade or the Mozarabs of Spain such as Petrus Alphonsi. In the 12th century Peter the Venerable obtained a translation of the Quran in Latin and a collection of information about Muhammad, so that the Christian scholars may refute the Islamic teachings. Christians explained the similarities between the two religions in the worst light possible, while Muhammad was turned into a dark legend. [218] For Peter the Venerable, Muhammad was not the Antichrist, but the successor of the heretic Arius of Alexandria and the precursor of the Antichrist. This wretched triad – which copied the Holy Trinity – had begun with Arius the heretic and the Arian heresy, continued with Muhammad and the heresy of Islam, and it was going

to culminate with the Antichrist and his devilish religion. [219]

In the 13th century Pedro Pascual, Ricoldo of Monte Croce and Ramon Llull depicted Muhammad as the Antichrist, while Islam took the shape of a Christian heresy. [220] In *Leggenda di Maometto* he is shown studying from childhood the dark arts, guided by a Christian heretic who had escaped from the prison of the Church of Arabia. With the help of these satanic teachings Muhammad perverted the Bible and founded a false religion. The text speaks also about the Islamic celebration of Friday (Latin: *dies veneris* – "the day of Venus"), in contrast to the Jewish celebration of Saturday and the Christian Sunday. The celebration of Friday was linked to the sexual depravity and the multitude of wives. Similarly, the Quran was explained as a heretical mixture between the teachings of the New and the Old Testament. This is why apparently the Islamic teachings allow polygamy like the ancient Jews. [221] Muhammad, according to legends, had a tragic end: he fainted due to alcohol and he was eaten by a herd of swine. So, Muslims forbid the consumption of alcohol and pork. Another widespread idea said that he was an impostor or a renegade cardinal of the Catholic Church who, in order to satisfy his own ambitions and appetite for power, decided to build his own religion and propagated a false theology. [222] Islam was frequently associated with barbarity, dark ignorance, [223] or presented as a variation of Arianism, Nestorianism or Monophysitism – Christian heresies from the Asian part of the Byzantine Empire.

Christians, at least until the time of the First Crusade, were not capable of making a distinction between real facts and fables; probably they did not even want to. For them, as for the Romans before them, the world was conveniently divided into two clearly delimited sides: us and them, believers and heretics, saved and damned. A rumor said that Muhammad was the Antichrist and that he died in the year 666, not 632 as it is in reality. In other versions of this rumor 666 symbolized the total number of years meant for Islam to be a world power. [224] Pope Innocent III (pope between 1198 and 1216) believed that the Second Coming would take place in 1284, 666 years after the rise of Islam. [225] It was also believed that Muslims worship Muhammad as a god, as Christians worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God. In this regard, Christians used a verbal expression through which the name "Muhammad" (or "Mohammed") was turned into "Mahound" – a name of a

devil or of a pagan god. [226]

The medieval European literature frequently referred to Muslims by words such as “infidels” or “pagans.” Depictions such as those in *Le Chanson de Roland* (1150) describe Muslims praising Muhammad (who in the song is written “Mahom” or “Mahumet”) as a god alongside the idolatrous deities Apollo and Lucifer. The three formed the ruling deity “Termagant” or the false trinity. [227] In Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy – Inferno* (XXVIII) Muhammad and his subordinate Ali are subjected to horrible tortures in the ninth pit of the eighth circle of Hell, a place destined to those who caused religious schisms. At the sight of Dante, Muhammad repents for preaching Islam, while Ali was condemned for the schism between the Sunni and the Shia. After the Battle of Hattin in 1187 the remaining Knights Templar chose martyrdom instead of converting to Islam, dying with the belief that they did not sell their soul to a false religion. [228] But later, in 1312, the Templars were judged for heresy and for the veneration of a demon named “Baphomet,” similar to the traditional translation of the name “Muhammad” into “Mahomet.” [229]

A more gentle description appears in the 13th century in *Estoire del Saint Grail* , the first book of the vast Arturyan cycle *Lancelot-Grail* . In describing the journeys of Joseph of Arimathea, the holder of the Holy Grail, the author says that most of the residents of the Middle East were pagans until the coming of Muhammad. The latter was a prophet sent by God to preach Christianity in the region, but the mission failed when his pride altered the divine will. Nevertheless, Muhammad’s religion is considered much superior to paganism. [230] Among the first positive descriptions of Islam is *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* in the 14th century, but it enumerates many incorrect and mythical features. This claims that only the Christian gospel will survive until the end of time, that Muslims are easy to convert or that their society is morally superior to the degenerated Christian one. The Jews are not forgotten either and they are blamed for not believing in Jesus Christ. [231]

4.2. THE ANTI-PAPAL APOCALYPTICISM AND THE FORESHADOWING OF THE REFORMATION

The medieval apocalypticism was fueled on the one hand by the Islamic

menace, which threatened the body of Christianity, and on the other hand by the church decadence, which threatened its soul. The corruption of the church appears in the eyes of the observers as an eloquent symptom of the universal disorder. From the sin of simony, the intemperance of the clergy for wealth to the perversion of the scriptures according to earthly interests, the moral filth present within the institution of God was believed to attract dreadful divine punishments. In the 7th century Beatus of Liébana said that "he [Nero] is Antichrist himself, who now rules subtly in the church through false priests, but then he will devastate the church openly." [232] Rodulphus Glaber, the chronicler of the year 1000, noticed that the lack of piety among the clergy throws mankind into the primordial chaos. [233] And in 1170 the nun Hildegarc of Bingen, surnamed the "Sibyl of the Rhine," described the church as a very beautiful woman, but, due to the fault of the priests, she was dirty, ragged, and with a body full of wounds and signs of violence. [234]

In the 11th century the Western Church became much too powerful, rich and corrupt. After Constantine the Great legalized the Christian religion, countless pagan elements have been inserted within Christianity through the process of conversion. Losing the war against the icons, excessive institutionalization and ritualism – these were the signs of a slow and unstoppable ideological alteration. This process accelerated in the West after the coronation of Charlemagne, when the Bishopric of Rome assumed a political role and became the center of Western Christianity. [235] Two centuries later the situation was as gloomy as possible. In 1032, after a long list of wretched popes, the papal chair was occupied by Benedict IX. This murderous and bisexual pope practiced witchcraft, necromancy, bestiality and Satanism, while his orgies in the Lateran Palace were legendary. Pope Victor III says about Benedict that "his life as a pope so vile, so foul, so execrable, that I shudder to think of it." [236] Assassinations, orgies, embezzlement, simony, executions and blasphemies – anything that the human mind can conceive in terms of wickedness, the popes have done it. [237]

Corruption influenced religious dogmas, which were modified or interpreted according to political and personal benefits. This thing deepened the religious differences between the Bishopric of Rome and the Patriarchate of Constantinople up to the point a rupture was inevitable. In fact, the schism between the East and the West took place due to political reasons rather than

religious ones.

At the end of the 4th century a legend was born, which said that Pope Sylvester I cured Constantine the Great of leprosy. As a sign of gratitude, Constantine baptized and built a church in the Lateran Palace. Four hundred years later *Donatio Constantini* (the "Donation of Constantine") appeared – a fantastic and absurd document in which Constantine gives the power over the city of Rome and the western regions of the Roman Empire to Pope Sylvester I and his successors. The alleged donation was meant to be a gift from the emperor to the pope because he miraculously cured him of leprosy, converted him to the Christian religion and baptized him. The text conferred to Sylvester and his successors the decisional power over territories in Judea, Greece, Asia, Thrace and Africa, Rome, Italy and the entire Western Roman Empire, while Constantine kept the imperial authority in the Eastern Roman Empire from Constantinople. [238]

Emperor Otto III considered that *Donatio Constantini* was a forgery. [239] The same position was adopted by the Byzantines. Nevertheless, in the middle of the 11th century Pope Leo IX sent a letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Caerularius, in which he cited a large portion of *Donatio Constantini* . Leo claimed in the letter not only that the text was authentic, but that it also represented the support for the dual power of the Holy See in Rome, which leads both an earthly empire and a heavenly one. In other words, the pope communicated to the patriarch that only the apostolic successor of Peter possesses the primacy and is the rightful ruler of the entire Christianity, and thus Rome is hierarchically and theologically superior to Constantinople. Caerularius rejected the claims of the Papacy, which led to the Great Schism of 1054. [240] Western clergy (Latin) came under the political and religious authority of the Bishopric of Rome and formed the Catholic Church (Latin: *Ecclesiae Catholicus* – the "Universal Church"). In turn, Eastern clergy (Greek) formed national churches, but they have all been generically called the "Orthodox Church" (Romanized Greek: *Ekklesia Orthosdoxa* – the "Church of the True Faith"). Attempts at reconciliation between the two branches of Christianity were made until the 14th century but without results.

Based on *Donatio Constantini* the popes continued to issue bulls through which they legitimized their implication in political affairs. In 1302, when the

king of France contested the political authority of the pope, Boniface VIII issued *Unam sanctam* , the most extreme assertion of papal supremacy ever made. [241] This bull expressed that the pope is the supreme leader of the entire Christianity, the spiritual order is superior to the material order and therefore no one can call to account the pope except God, and that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff. [242]

In *De Monarchia* (1313) Dante Alighieri criticized the theocratic point of view expressed by *Unam sanctam* . He argued that, although they have different purposes and attributions, both the pope and the emperor are human beings and they receive their authority from the same God. Likewise, in the *Divine Comedy – Inferno* (XIX:106-111, 115-117) Dante condemned the church because it became corrupted by worldly things and he identified it with the Whore of Babylon:

Shepherds such as ye the Evangelist perceived,

When she, that sitteth on the waters, [The Whore of Babylon]

Was seen by him committing fornication with the kings;

She that was born with seven heads,

And in her ten horns had a witness

So long as virtue pleased her spouse.

...

Ah Constantine! To how much ill gave birth,

Not thy conversion, but that dower [donation]

Which the first rich Father took from thee! [243]

In the 15th century Nicolaus Cusanus and Lorenzo Valla proved that *Donatio Constantini* was indeed a forgery. [244] But their endeavors came too late and they were too weak to change anything. The damage had already been done:

in the center of Italy the Papal States were established as an independent state with the capital in Rome and the image of the pope as a secular ruler was too grounded in Western mindset.

4.2.1. The anti-clerical messianisms

While the Papacy was busy demonizing Islam and the kings struggled to raise armies and money to confront the forces of evil near Jerusalem, a new apocalyptic phenomenon erupted among the masses. This did not target groups outside Christendom, but the very institution of God. The increasing number of heresies, the growing interest in magic, astrology and the occult, or the callings for reform – all these signaled that something was wrong with the church.

According to historical documents, heresies and messianisms were outbreaks of social infection centered on skilled impostors. These were often part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but they were declared heretics after they dared to publicly question the official doctrine. Henry of Lausanne dressed in a sac (as biblical prophets did in harsh times), rejected the utility of the institution of the church and denied the fundamental concepts of original sin and baptism. Peter of Bruys was even more radical: he rejected all objects of worship, including crosses, rejected the Old Testament and said that the Eucharist is a fraud because the transformation of the body and blood was a unique miracle that took place at the Last Supper. Both attracted followers and incited violence against the established order. Henry of Lausanne died in prison in 1148, while Peter of Bruys was killed by an angry mob in 1131, pushed into the fire where he was burning crosses.

In 1119 the monk Arnold of Brescia protested against the corruption of the church and demanded the restoration of the apostolic poverty. Because the calling of Christ is purely spiritual, all the things of this earth belong to the laity and the civil authorities. The institution of the church and the clergy should live like the apostles and Christ, from tithes and the voluntary offerings of the people. Arnold of Brescia was hanged in 1155, but his ideas of separation between church and state, apostolic poverty and opposition to the earthly power of the Papacy appeared later within the Franciscan Order. [245]

Because priests commonly lived with women, the layman Tanchelm of Antwerp said that the churches were nothing but brothels which did not deserve any tithe. He entitled himself the “Son of God,” dressed himself in golden clothes, encouraged sexual excess and gathered a gang of disciples. The adherents worshiped Tanchelm so much that they drank the water he washed in. In 1115, after three years of preaching, he was killed by a priest. Inspired by Tanchelm, Manasses the blacksmith formed a fraternity composed of 12 men, representing the 12 apostles, and a whore in the role of the Virgin Mary. [246]

One of the most hilarious messianic cases ever recorded was that of Éon (known by his Latin name “Eudo de Stella,” or by the French name “Éon de l’Étoile”). According to the English historian William of Newburgh, Éon was a Breton hermit monk who experienced a false epiphany around 1140. When he heard a priest saying in Latin the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed: *Per eum qui venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos* (“by him who shall come to judge the quick and the dead, and the world by fire”), Éon believed that the word *eum* in the creed (which resembles the name “Éon”) refers to his person. [247] Eight years later, when a comet appeared on the night sky, he was so impressed by the astral phenomenon that added to his name the epithet *de l’Étoile* , which means “of the star.”

Due to the popularity he enjoyed, Éon became a subject of legends. Rumors spoke about his extraordinary magic, the radiance that surrounded him, his ability to be in several places at once and the sumptuous feasts with which he treated his companions. According to the prevailing “wisdom” of the time, Éon’s riches were not real, but imaginary; they came from the devil’s power of deception. In reality, the opulence of the dissidents was due to plundering abbeys and monasteries. In 1148 Éon was arrested, tortured to confess his sins, found guilty of heresy by the Council of Reims and condemned to life imprisonment. [248]

Christ of Bourges, Tanchelm or Éon represent a small fraction of the multitude of messianic figures that populated the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, things will never be clear regarding this kind of historical episodes because the main sources of information are clergymen. History is written by the victors. Recorded *post-facto* or *post-defunctu* , heresies and

messianisms were ridiculed or exaggerated in order to serve as examples for those who were tempted to follow a similar path.

Medieval scribes had the tendency to exaggerate or to mythicize real characters and events in order to emphasize the influence of the supernatural forces, God and the devil. Heretics and messiahs were rather reformers who protested against the corruption, the greed and the depravity of the clergymen. But libertinism, immorality and demonization were accusations commonly thrown upon those who dared to challenge the status of the church. Self-divinization, or comparing yourself to God, is the gravest sin; Lucifer himself was cast out of Heaven due to this sin. Only the thought of it was enough to cause chills down the spine to any God-fearing man. So, the accusation of self-divinization was a form of propaganda. And the antithetical representation between rebels and personalities who helped the church confirms this idea. *Legenda aurea* (1260) of the Italian Jacobus de Voragine enumerates more than 150 legends about the life of the saints. [249] All depict positive aspects such as divine interventions, encounters with angels, revelations, modesty, morality, faith, humbleness, wisdom and temperance. In order to attract political support, the church repaid many of these "positive" men by posthumously beatifying or canonizing them. A similar process of mythicization can be seen in Islam as well with personalities such as Muhammad or Saladin. Rebels, on the contrary, were cursed, anathematized and accused of demonic possession, witchcraft, fraud, immorality, stupidity or adultery.

The spiritual features were mirrored by the physical ones. In the Middle Ages disease and suffering were associated with God's punishment or the devil's influence. Important people were mostly portrayed as tall, imposing, stately, beautiful and with a healthy appearance – a reference to the angelic appearance, heavenly order or divine protection. By contrast, rebels were portrayed as small, ugly and with physical flaws – a reference to the scary and disgusting look of the devil in Christian iconography. So, people are saints for the side they defend, and demons for the side they oppress.

4.2.2. Joachim of Fiore and the three ages of history

In 1159, at the age of 25, the Calabrian monk Joachim of Fiore searched for

the will of God through a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. According to the legend, at a turning point, just when he thought he would die of exhaustion in the desert of Palestine, Joachim had a revelation similar to that of John the Apostle: a man and a river of oil were shown to him; after he drank from the river of oil he woke up and he realized that he knew all the meanings of the Holy Scripture.

Upon returning to Italy in 1170 Joachim entirely dedicated himself to Bible study and he joined the Cistercian Order, characterized by extreme austerity. In the following years he published *De unitate seu essentia Trinitatis* , in which he attacked the Trinitarian teachings of Petrus Lombardus. Then, in 1183, while he was at the Cistercian abbey of Camasari, just the night before the celebration of the Resurrection, Joachim had a new supernatural experience through which he understood the fullness of the Book of Revelation. [250] And, finally, a third revelation occurred in the same year during the celebration of Pentecost, though which it was revealed to him the mystery of the Holy Trinity. [251] Based on these unusual experiences Joachim conceived the trilogy that made him famous: *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti* , *Expositio in Apocalypsim* and *Psalterium decem chordarum* . Written over a period of 16 years, the three works were designed to be read as a whole.

In chronological order, *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti* was composed first and it set the style and the frame for the other two. In an elaborate parallel, Joachim tried to determine the correspondence of every person, event and period that can be found in the Old Testament with a person, event or period in the New Testament. Then these correspondences were shown as prefigurations of similar persons, events and periods within the era that was about to come. In essence, *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti* is an elaborate philosophy of history.

The second work, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* is a detailed commentary about the meanings of the signs described in the Book of Revelation – the key to understanding the entire Holy Scripture – but in relation to the other biblical books, especially the gospels and Genesis. *Expositio in Apocalypsim* is the basis of the entire Joachimite biblical exegesis.

Finally, *Psalterium decem chordarum* is an allegorical presentation of the

three ages of universal history in accordance to the tripartite image of God. Joachim explains how the triangular body of the psaltery (a symbol for Trinity) requires all the three wedges (a symbol for the three persons) to fulfill its purpose and to complete the entire body of the instrument. The body of the instrument represents the Father, the songs sung with the help of the instrument represent the Son, and the melody produced both by the instrument and the action of singing represents the Holy Spirit, coming from both the Father and the Son. The wedges of the psaltery can also be approached separately, but they cease to be an instrument and they can no longer produce the same music. [252]

In 1200 the first two books of the trilogy were completed and offered for analysis to Pope Innocent III. But Joachim died in March 1202 at Pietrafitta, before he could find out the position of the pope. Thus, the Joachimite debate and the controversies regarding his works began *post-mortem* .

Joachim's eschatological theories are based on the image of the Creator and the relation between the Creator and his Creation. God created the Universe according to his limitless wisdom, and he created man in his own image. Thus, human beings can search for God in two ways: through his Word (the Bible) and through his Creation (the Universe). Both ways help people know God. [253] Because Creation is an emanation and an imperfect reflection of the Creator (an idea most likely taken from the Greek philosopher Plotinus), Joachim saw the organization and functioning of nature structured after the image of God. And God's perfection demanded symmetry.

The medieval Christians inherited geographic knowledge from the Romans and the Greeks and adapted it to the Christian doctrine. In the 7th century in *Etymologiae* Isidore sketched the map of the world as a circle divided into three parts by the letter "T," with the part representing Asia equal to half of the circle, and Europe and Africa equal to a quarter each. [254] Jerusalem was placed in the geometrical (and spiritual) center of the world, where the three continents meet. Genesis 9 confirmed this image: Noah had three sons – Shem, Ham and Japheth – who multiplied and, it was believed, each populated a continent. This conception about the shape of the earth was embraced by subsequent scholars and it lasted until the 16th century. So, at the time of Joachim the entire landmass was believed to have a tripartite

division similar to the tripartite image of God.

Joachim went even further with the idea of divine symmetry and applied it to the flowing of time. According to the Bible, the relation between man and God is divided into two large ages separated by the First Coming of the Son of God. And the Book of Revelation also says that a new, third age would begin at the Second Coming of the Son of God. Hence, the Calabrian monk believed that, as space is divided into three parts resembling the structure of the Trinity, in the same way universal history is divided into three ages:

(1) The Age of the Father – or the Age of the Law, corresponding to the period of the Old Testament and characterized by the obedience of the Israelites to God's rules.

(2) The Age of the Son – or the Age of Christendom, between the resurrection of Christ and the year 1260, corresponding to the period of the New Testament, when man became the son of God.

(3) The Age of the Holy Spirit – or the Age of the Spirit, which was going to be established sometime between 1200 and 1260. [255]

Joachim structured history in an immediate, sensual and narrative form, as a writer who outlines the structure of a novel. The Kingdom of the Holy Spirit was about to bring a new distribution of universal love and a new age of peace and understanding, [256] based on the "Eternal Gospel" mentioned in Revelation 14:6. This new gospel, dictated by Christ himself, was going to be embraced by all mankind. And, as the synagogue was replaced by the church, in the same way the church was to be replaced by a new system of religious and social organization called the "Order of the Just."

The Calabrian monk concluded that the third age would begin in the year 1260 on the basis of two arguments. The first argument emerges from the interpretation of two verses of Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is [The Son] and who was [The Father] and who is to come [The Holy Spirit], the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8); "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (Revelation 12:6). Joachim applied the traditional biblical conversion

day/year, and thus the length of the Age of the Son was believed to have 1,260 years.

The second argument emerges from the same image of the Trinity. God is one, formed of three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, all in a relation of perfect symmetry to each other. Due to the fact that every person of God predominantly manifested, is manifesting and will manifest himself in historical periods, it follows that these three periods corresponding to the persons of Trinity must be equal to each other. The problem was that the early Christian (and Jewish) theologians had already proved that between the fall of Adam and the First Coming there was a temporal distance of at least 3,000 years. On the other hand, the Millennium, or the Age of the Spirit, is precisely determined in the Book of Revelation at 1,000 years. So a temporal symmetry between the three ages was excluded.

Joachim ignored the temporal speculations and focused on numerological ones. He determined the symmetry of the ages according to another criterion, equally precise and convincing: the number of generations. The genealogies exposed in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the details of the Old Testament and the exegesis of the millennial week show that between the creation of Adam and Christ's coming (the Age of the Father) there were 42 generations. Likewise, in the Age of the Son and in that of the Holy Spirit there would be 42 generations each. Joachim, however, did not define what he understood by "generation" and why he chose the age of 30 for a generation. In the Bible there are no major references to the number 30; most probably the number was obtained by dividing 1260 to 42. [257] In Revelation the two numbers are mentioned and associated in key contexts: "forty and two months ... a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (Revelation 11:2-3); "forty and two months" (Revelation 13:5); "a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (Revelation 12:6).

Joachim's eschatological approach elegantly eluded the interpretations, calculations and traditions regarding the age of the world. [258] It did not matter anymore that Noah or Moses lived a certain number of years; it was enough to determine their existence. The Joachimite doctrine was simple, efficient and new, never attempted before, as if it was the result of divine revelation. Together with his contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity, the

theory of the three ages brought Joachim a huge fame.

The passing from the Age of the Son to that of the Holy Spirit was going to be marked by major social and religious changes. But the monk did not state anything about the signs of the times and how the Age of the Spirit would be revealed; posterity received the task to watch for these aspects. Accordingly, his ideas generated fiery polemics. They were enthusiastically adopted by the Franciscans [259] and mystics, but within the church they were rapidly contested. The first oppositions appeared at the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215, which condemned the Joachimite criticism against the Trinitarian theories of Petrus Lombardus. In addition, a number of prophetic works had been falsely ascribed to Joachim, which further deteriorated his reputation. *De Oneribus Prophetarum* , *Expositio Sybillae et Merlini* , the pseudo-prophecies of the popes *Vaticinia de Summis Pontificibus* and various annotations about the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah were intentionally ascribed to the Calabrian monk in order to generate certain administrative or religious effects. But, due to the political interests that gravitated around the prophecies of the popes, they undermined Joachim's true work and beliefs. [260]

The scandal of the Eternal Gospel was another major hit to Joachim's work. In 1248 the Sicilian Gerardo de Borgo San Donnino tried to convince Louis IX of France not to participate in the Eighth Crusade by using the Joachimite theories. Later, Gerardo published in Paris *Liber introductorium in evangelium aeternum* in which he boldly stated that the Order of the Just – supposed to lead the Catholic Church after the installation of the Age of the Holy Spirit – was the Franciscan Order. [261] But the Synod of Arles in 1255 condemned as heretical the writings of Gerardo de Borgo, indirectly condemning the doctrine of Joachim. The concept of Eternal Gospel was rejected by prelates because it contested the hierarchy and the authority of the Catholic Church and was a potential source of heresies and revolts. Later, in 1263, after the year 1260 passed without the establishment of the Age of the Spirit, a council in Arles condemned the entire scheme of the three ages. In the same year Gerardo was arrested and sentenced to life in prison because he refused to recant his beliefs. Thomas Aquinas confuted the theories of Joachim in *Summa Theologiae* , but in the *Divine Comedy* Dante placed him i *Paradise* in the circle of the Sun, near Saint Bonaventura and Saint Francis (XII:136-143). [262]

Although Joachim's calculations failed, the Franciscans enthusiastically assimilated the system of the three ages because it was seen as a subtle call for ecclesiastical reform. In the 13th century Petrus Iohannis Olivi was one of the fiercest defenders of Joachimism and the Age of the Spirit. Olivi believed that the Book of Revelation is a map of the historical evolution of the church – an idea that preceded the Protestant-historicist view. He divided the history of the Old Testament into seven periods, mirrored by other seven periods of the New Testament. The world at the end of the 13th century was at the transition between the fifth and the sixth age of the New Testament. In order to determine what was about to happen at the end of days, Christians had therefore to seek guidance in the corresponding events of the Old Testament. In the fifth period, which started in the 8th century, the church became big, powerful and corrupt. The sixth period of the history of the church began in the 12th century, initially through the prophetic gifts of Joachim of Fiore and then, more obviously, through the birth of Saint Francis of Assisi and the establishment of the Franciscan Order. [263] The Age of the Father lasted from the creation of man until the advent of Christ, and the Age of the Son extended from the birth of Christ until Saint Francis, the harbinger of the Age of the Spirit. Olivi thought that the Antichrist would rise sometime between 1300 and 1340, after which the world would enter the new age, which would end around the year 2000 with the Last Judgment. [264]

Olivi did not suggest that the institution of the church would be replaced by a new organization or that the teachings of Christ would become obsolete and they would be discarded. Yet, something new and extraordinary had to happen because the church is an institution that has to continuously reform itself, abreast with the development of knowledge:

> *For just as a tree, when it is nothing but a root, cannot be totally explicated or explicitly demonstrated to all so well as when it is fulfilled in branches, leaves, flowers and fruits, so the tree or fabric of the church and divine providence and wisdom shining forth and shared in its diverse parts could not and should not have been explicated from the beginning as it can and should be at its fulfillment. And thus, just as from the beginning of the world to Christ the illumination of the people of God and explication of the order and procession of the entire Old Testament and providence of God in the establishment and governance*

of the world increased successively, so it is with the illuminations and explications of Christian wisdom in the time of the New Testament. [265]

The existential model of the third age was the life of Francis of Assisi, characterized by poverty, modesty, peace, humbleness, contemplative wisdom and missionary zeal. Francis attempted to preach to Muslims three times. One occasion was in the sixth year after his conversion, which proved that he was the angel of the sixth seal and that Muslims would be converted by his order in the sixth period of the church. He attempted again in the 13th year after his conversion, which meant that Muslims and other infidels would begin to be converted by his order in the 13th century. Olivi noticed that, as on the 13th day from birth the three wise men appeared in front of Christ and at the age of 13 he was found in the Temple preaching, in the same way in the 13th century Francis and his evangelical order rose to glory. Francis of Assisi seems to have experienced *stigmata* (the wounds of Christ), which made Olivi believe that he would be resurrected before the Second Coming of Christ. [266]

In *Postilla in Apocalypsim* Olivi praised the practitioners of true poverty and condemned the corrupt administration of the church, the cradle of the Antichrist. At the end of times the role of the high priests and Pharisees from the time of Christ would be played by popes, cardinals and bishops. The Antichrist would take control of the Papacy, while a handful of chosen people would defend the flock of believers against those who were once leaders. As the new Age of the Spirit would be established, those who held power under the old regime would violently oppose the change. The end of the world was going to be in fact the battle between the old and the new, between the existing order and the following order. The adherents of the new age would be persecuted by the adherents of the old age, as the adherents of the Old Covenant, the Jews, persecuted the adherents of the New Covenant, the early Christians. Many would run toward non-Christian realms, where they would find a better audience than the one at home and they would start the process of converting the entire world. Ultimately, Christ would reveal himself and he would destroy the Antichrist, clearing the path for the complete installation of the new order. [267]

Joachim’s writings announced a major change within Christianity, while the

Joachimites attempted to cause that change. The Beguines, the Waldensians, some Franciscans and Cathars – groups influenced by Joachimism – were the forerunners of the Protestant Reformation. They all, more or less, condemned the corrupt state of the Catholic Church, called it the Whore of Babylon and the source of all theological errors. [268] Eager to separate themselves from the Catholic hierarchy, the Joachimites invested their hopes in the image of an angelic (Franciscan) pope, who was to appear at the end of times before the Antichrist and Parousia. [269] The angelic pope (Latin: *Pastor Angelicus*) was supposed to purify the church of all the injustices and, due to his holiness, the Greeks (Orthodox) were going to return under the authority of the pope, the Tatars were going to convert and the Saracens would be destroyed. [270] The angelic pope was in fact an ecclesiastical adaptation of the image of the messianic emperor. While the messianic emperor had to deliver the world's temporal power to Christ, the angelic pope had to give him the spiritual power. The concept of angelic pope was stated even in the prophecies about the succession of the popes and it was a sort of an apocalyptic counterpart of Saint Peter: Christ gave the keys of the church to the first pope and he will take them back at his Second Coming from the last pope.

4.2.3. The burst of mysticism

The conflict between the decadent Papacy of Avignon and the German emperor, the Hundred Years' War, the famine and the plague, the beginning of the Inquisition, the fall of the Knights Templar and the insatiable greed of the clergy shattered the faith of the masses. Spirituality and the salvation of man were an acute problem; and where religious dogmas were unsatisfactory, dissident movements rose to preach an alternative point of view based on mysticism.

The 14th century was the golden age of mysticism. Mysticism refers to the desire to evade the inferior material level of existence, to separate oneself from the formality and superficiality of the ordinary religious life, and to find the union with God. Mysticism is positioned at the border between science and religion; it takes elements from both sides and by combining them it creates for itself a specific identity. Mystics differ one from another in their approach, teachings and lifestyle, but they usually practice social isolation and self-denial. Joachim of Fiore is considered the father of the European

medieval mysticism because the theory of the three ages bent myriads of curious heads toward alternative levels of knowledge in search for answers. Astrology, numerology, magic and other similar areas began to grow and bring new ways of eschatological interpretation.

Many like Olivi wondered *when* and *how* the Age of the Spirit would be established. According to Arnald of Villanova, a 14th-century physician, the end of the world would take place in 1378 due to the fulfilling of the 1290 days from Daniel 12:11. [271] *Expositio super Apocalypsi* , Villanova's most important work, is similar to medical treaties, especially the commentaries of diagnosis. Villanova's analysis of Revelation seems to depict the evolution of a disease in the final stage. Like a sequence of symptoms, it is tabular, with commentaries made point by point, verse by verse, on the succession of events. It explains the world's history – which is divided into three stages representing the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – and the meanings applied to the holy texts in corresponding levels: literal, allegorical and moral. Universal history is one and the same with the history of the church, which started with the apostles, continued with the martyrs, the Church Fathers, the hermits, the saints, and it was about to end with the angelic pope, the rise of the Antichrist due to the ecclesiastical corruption and the Second Coming of Christ. Villanova believed that the church, if it wished to elude the final stage of the world's disease, had to "sanitize" itself through reform. Otherwise, its "disease" was going to reach an irreversible point. [272] In addition, neither the Antichrist nor the angelic pope was a problem of determining personalities, but a problem of reaction: each pope could choose if he would represent the Antichrist or if he would be the angelic pope.

In the 14th century the Franciscan Jean of Roquetaillade embraced a part of Villanova's theories. He harshly criticized the corruption and the opulence of the clergy, while his prophecies copied the Joachimite-Franciscan apocalyptic theories already condemned as heretical. Between 1344 and 1356, while he was in prison, he prophesied the rise of the angelic pope after Innocent VI (d.1362), the advent of the Antichrist in 1366, followed in 1369 or 1370 by the establishment of the Millennium. [273]

In the 12th century in southern France the famous and powerful French Cathar sect gained momentum. [274] Although it was rooted in the ascetic

movements and mendicant orders, Catharism violently protested against the corruption of the Catholic Church. The Cathars claimed an apostolic succession from the founders of Christendom and accused Rome of corrupting the apostolic message after the acceptance of *Donatio Constantini* by Sylvester I. [275]

In order to suppress the pandemic of heresy, the Papacy founded the institution of Inquisition. It is interesting that in the battle between dissidents and the dominant church apocalyptic messages were used as weapons by both sides. Dissidents accused the Catholic Church of being the Whore of Babylon. On the other side of the barricade, the prelates attempted to maintain order and obedience through material and spiritual threats. At a time when Catharism was still troubling the region of Languedoc, the fortress-cathedral Sainte-Cécile in the city of Albi was built as a bastion against heresy. On the interior walls of the edifice terrifying scenes of Hell and Judgment Day are depicted – a clear message which showed the fate of those who do not obey the precepts of Catholicism. This was no longer only a religious warfare, but also a psychological one; the institution of the church assured its success by using the instrument of fear: fear of stake, fear of death, fear of torture and especially fear of the eternal torments of Hell.

Catharism signaled that the dissidents transitioned from a passive protest, characterized by isolation and a simple lifestyle, to an active protest, characterized by open sermons and violence. The prelates feared that other groups might follow the example. Consequently, the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 banned all mendicant orders established without papal approval.

One of the groups directly affected by the ban was the Apostolic Brethren, founded in Northern Italy by Gherardo Segarelli. The apostolic project was a mute protest against the church wealth. It aimed to restore a so-called apostolic lifestyle characterized by modesty, poverty, no fixed residence, no care for tomorrow, fasting, praying, preaching penitence, working enough only to eat or living at the mercy of the outsiders. [276] But in 1300 Segarelli was found guilty of heresy and burned at stake by the Inquisition in Parma. This thing allowed Fra Dolcino of Novara to take the leadership of the Apostolic Brethren and to reorganize it in the sect of Dulcinianism. Inspired by Joachim, Fra Dolcino divided the history of mankind into four ages:

(1) The period of the Old Testament, when man multiplied.

(2) The period of Jesus Christ and the apostles, characterized by chastity and humbleness.

(3) The period that began with Constantine the Great and Pope Sylvester I, characterized by the decadence of the church due to personal ambitions and excessive wealth (Cathar influence).

(4) The eternal period of the Apostolics, led by Segarelli and Fra Dolcino, characterized by an apostolic lifestyle and the absence of any form of government.

Dulcinianism – which toward the end of its existence turned into a paramilitary group, plundering and killing everyone who opposed them [277] – was destroyed in 1307, when the crusaders conquered the fortification in Mount Rubello, in the Italian Alps. [278] In *Inferno* (XXVIII:55-60), written in fact after the death of Fra Dolcino, but expressed as if it was written before, Muhammad requests Dante to warn Fra Dolcino of what expects him for committing heresy. At first sight Muhammad's gesture seems to be a subtle admonishment to the readers to unconditionally obey the Catholic precepts. But in the next *canto* the poet condemns the church for the corruption and the love of money of the prelates.

Mysticism found the most favorable place in the French and German regions, the future battleground between Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation. The Brethren of the Free Spirit – a Joachimite sect appeared at the end of the 13th century – said that the first age, of the Father, was the period of the Old Testament (of Abraham, Moses and the prophets); the second age, of the Son, corresponded to the First Coming of Christ and the first Christian millennium; and the last and imminent final age is the one of the Holy Spirit, when God incarnates in all humanity. For the Brethren, the Age of the Spirit was already established but it could only be experienced through a process of austerity, self-denial and annihilation of the Ego. They called themselves the "illuminated" because they thought they evolved beyond good and evil. The Age of the Spirit meant a union between humanity and God, which freed the individual from any past or future sin.

The Dominican Johannes “Meister” Eckhart – a great promoter of mysticism in the German regions – preached that the supreme end of existence is possible only through the absorption of the individual in the infinite substance of God. Man does not need God. If nature is God, everyone can justly claim that he created the Universe. Man is free from any virtues and all his actions are virtuous. There is no sin, because everything man does, God does it as well. The sacraments, the rituals and the religious services are useless. Nobody is forced to work for his bread, everything belongs to the public domain and anyone can take what he wants and what he needs. [279]

The Joachimites, and not Joachim himself, condemned the Catholic Church for turning into the Whore of Babylon, the persecutor of the saints. But at the same time they hoped that the Age of Spirit was going to be established through the efforts of an angelic pope and a messianic emperor that would foreshadow Christ’s descent. Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen was twice excommunicated, he was slandered in the Catholic chronicles, his empire was in permanent conflict with the Papal States and Pope Gregory IX even called him the Antichrist. But the Joachimites saw the “Sun King” – as Frederick was called – as the one who would lead the people into the Millennium. The “Sun King” – as he was called – was a man ahead of his time. He declared himself to be a successor of the Roman emperors, he outlawed trials by ordeal on grounds of irrationality, he went alone in the Sixth Crusade and he managed to crown himself King of Jerusalem in 1229. [280] When he died in 1250, a prophecy that copied the Tiburtine Sibyl about Constantine the Great lamented the end of the Roman Empire. Others refused to believe that he was gone. A German myth said that Frederick was sleeping in a cave hidden in the mountains of Bavaria or Thuringia. He was supposed to come back when the ravens ceased to fly above the mountains, a sign that it was the time for the final battle against the corruption of the state and the church. [281] This myth gave the rebels the opportunity to use it to their advantage, two pseudo-Fredericks being burned at the stake by his successor to the throne. [282]

4.2.4. The Black Plague and the flagellants

In a society in which the rules of hygiene and microbiology were unknown, diseases were a normal aspect of everyday life. Until the 14th century Europe

was repeatedly swept by microscopic agents. The smallpox epidemics of the 2nd and 3rd centuries exterminated around five million people. In the 4th century the bubonic plague put an end to the life of 25 million people. And between 1348 and 1400 the Black Plague (or the Black Death) killed around 100 million people in the entire world and it reduced Europe's population by a third. [283]

Wars, famine and climate contributed to the severity of the pestilence. In the 14th century the Little Ice Age began. The unusual rainy autumn of 1314 marked the start of a series of very cold and wet winters, followed by almost nonexistent spring crops. Between 1315 and 1322 the Great Famine struck Northwestern Europe, causing extreme levels of criminality, diseases, collective deaths and even situations of cannibalism and infanticide. The death toll was in the millions. The famine manifested itself mainly because of the adverse conditions, but also due to the demographic growth of the previous centuries; the productive capacity of crops could no longer sustain the number of people. [284]

The Black Plague started in China and it spread across Asia, Europe and Africa through ships. The disease attacked mankind in one of its most irrational and vulnerable periods. Wherever it reached, it found favorable conditions to reap lives: insalubrious habits, a filthy lifestyle, an underfed population, the lack of knowledge about the mechanism of contagion and ignorant societies in which superstition could explain everything. The symptoms of the disease started with tumors in the inguinal region and swellings the size of an egg, without fever. No medicine could bring comfort and almost all the affected died within three days, humans and animals alike. In front of an invisible and incomprehensible enemy, the calamity was attributed to God's wrath.

There was already a habit for the Jews to be persecuted for the disasters falling upon Christians. During the calamity the Jews were accused of poisoning the air and the water wells. Under horrible tortures many confessed that they acted in this way. It was the same in the case of witches; the epidemic was thought to be the result of dark magic as well. Later, a rumor said that the plague spread through *miasma* ("bad air"). [285] In Mainz 12,000 Jews suffered a terrible death. At Esslingen, after they refused baptism, the

entire Jewish community was gathered in the synagogue and set on fire. Pope Clement VI protected them in Avignon and he declared them not guilty of spreading the plague through two papal bulls. But his words had no effect in the face of fury and despair. The horrible visit of the angel of death hardened the hearts of the people. Everywhere the influence of the authority, human or divine, considerably diminished or disappeared altogether. [286] The moral effects of this dreadful calamity were, as a whole, deplorable. For some it brought penitence and the circumstances to meditate at death and salvation; for others it was an extreme experience that pushed them toward selfishness and moral indifference. [287]

For the relation between the parishioners and the church the plague was like a cold shower. In a society where the final refuge to all problems was the divine, no prayer, no worship and no flagellation had any effect in the face of this invisible slayer. The epidemic gave rise to cynicism toward religious officials who could not keep their promise of healing the victims and exorcising the disease. The clerics were dying alongside the laymen, without any discrimination. No one was able to cure it or even to reasonably explain its causes. For the scourged population the message was crystal clear: God turned away from mankind. The impossibility of the clergy to cure or to chase away the disease advantaged the heretic movements, which claimed that the failure of the prayers was due to the corruption of the church. [288]

After 1350 European culture turned morbid, dominated by pessimism. The art darkened, insisting on the image of death. All communities touched by the plague experienced terrifying scenes, as if Hell itself descended upon the earth. In the introduction to the *Decameron* Giovanni Boccaccio describes the destruction caused in Florence by this terrible malady, which he ascribes it to the configuration of the stars or divine wrath. Likewise, the personal notes of Agnolo di Tura details occurrences from the city of Siena of a dreadful cruelty:

> *Father abandoned child, wife husband, one brother another; for the illness seemed to strike through breath and sight. And so they died. And no one could be found to bury the dead for money or friendship. Members of a household brought their dead to a ditch as best they could, without priest, without divine offices. Great pits were dug and*

piled deep with the multitude of dead. And they died by the hundreds, both day and night. And as soon as those ditches were filled, more were dug. ... And I, Agnolo di Tura, called the Fat, buried my five children with my own hands. And there were also those who were so sparsely covered with earth that the dogs dragged them forth and devoured many bodies throughout the city. There was no one who wept for any death, for all awaited death. And so many died that all believed it was the end of the world. [289]

The letter of the musician Louis Heyligen of Beerigen portrays a similar situation in the city of Avignon:

Because of the growing strength of this disease it has come to pass that, for fear of infection, no doctor will visit the sick (not if he were to be given everything the sick man owns), nor will the father visit the son, the mother the daughter, the brother the brother, the son the father, the friend the friend, the acquaintance the acquaintance, not anyone a blood relation – unless, that is, they wished to die suddenly along with them, or to follow them at once. And thus an uncountable number of people died without any mark of affection, piety or charity ... To be brief, at least half the people of Avignon died; for there are now within the walls of the city more than 7,000 houses where no one lives because everyone in them has died, and in the suburbs one might imagine that there is not one survivor. ... In Marseilles all the gates of the city save for two posterns were closed, for there four out of five people died. Nor did it help to flee, for it was believed that flight to healthier air only meant that people died more quickly. ... And it is the common report among ordinary people that the sick are treated like dogs by their families – they put food and drink next to the sick bed and then flee the house. ... Priests do not hear the confessions of the sick, or administer the sacraments to them. Everyone who is still healthy looks after himself. ... They say that in the three months from 25 January to the present day, a total of 62,000 bodies was buried in Avignon. [290]

If there has ever been a period when people were entitled to believe that the end is coming, this was the one. The Black Plague seemed to be the opening of the fourth seal and the unleashing of the fourth horseman of the

Apocalypse, Death (Revelation 6:7-8). In this context, there is no wonder that people began to ask themselves when Emperor Frederick II would revive, when the angelic pope would take his seat, or when the Antichrist would rise. [291] Everyone tried to pacify God the best they could: through donations to the church, prayers, public processions or preaching peace. Others attempted to flee. During great calamities fanatics and maniacs are engendered and brought to surface; and in the middle of the havoc of the Black Death a very strange religious phenomenon developed: flagellation.

The flagellants were groups of people of both genders and of all ages that, as a sign of penitence, publicly whipped their bodies. These had the role of purifiers of the soul, who mistreat themselves without mercy in order to absolve the sins of themselves and of others. Flagellation, as a form of penitence, is ancient; various pre-Christian religions such as the cult of Isis in Egypt or the cult of Dionysus in Greece practiced their own forms of flagellation. In Roman society women were hit at the festival of Lupercalia to be fertile. In Christianity the practice of flagellation became a form of penitence within ascetic monastic orders, which practiced the “mortification of the flesh” – a more severe form of flagellation. The idea comes from the literal application of the recommendations of Paul the Apostle (Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 9:27) and Christ: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

The mortification of the flesh is hard to understand from a modern perspective. It can be compared with the motto “no pain, no gain,” and it can be associated with the training of professional athletes or the diets for weight loss. In Christian exegesis the purpose of flagellation is the victory of the soul over the body and ultimately salvation. The needs of the body are associated with the decayed nature of man, with his selfish impulses and ambitions, which are a consequence of original sin. Jesus expects believers to free themselves from the bondage of the body’s cravings. Christians voluntarily have practiced penances to imitate Christ who voluntarily accepted to be crucified for the redemption of mankind. The early Christians mortified their flesh through martyrdom, gladly accepting torture. Another way of torture and self-denial was celibacy and the abandonment of sex and procreation. Starting with the 6th century the hermits populated the desert as a way of penitence. Jerome, the scholar who translated the Bible into Latin, is famous

for the penances he applied to himself. Likewise, the 11th century the zealot Dominicus Loricatus is said to have applied around 300,000 lashes on his back within a period of six days. [292] And in the 21st century public processions of flagellation can be seen in communities in Central and South America.

Unlike other ecclesiastical orders, the flagellants of the Black Plague brought these practices to public places, cities and markets, as a demonstration of piety. They had the bottom part of the face covered, they were dressed in black, with red crosses on the front and on the back of the tunic and on the black hat. Each one carried a whip of three knotted ropes, with iron edges. Beautiful placards and burning torches were placed among them and on the sound of bells and hymns they were marching toward the places set for penitence. There they undressed to the waist and removed their footwear. They were arranged in a big circle, in different positions, according to their sins, enduring criticism from their leader. Then they stood up and began to whip themselves, loudly singing psalms or prayers. [293]

The first flagellant manifestation was recorded in Perugia in 1259, after a severe famine and a year before the temporal limit set by Joachim for the establishment of the Age of the Spirit. Here, the voice of an angel warned the layman Raniero Fasani that the city was going to be destroyed if its inhabitants would not expiate their sins through self-flagellation. [294] Later, Fasani was said to have received the instructions of flagellation through a letter. It is possible that Fasani hallucinated due to hunger; but, in the given context, a solution to the most pressing problems was welcome. Practiced from one place to another, the movement spread in Northern Italy and then in all corners of Europe. [295]

Unfortunately, the itinerant penitential practices worsened the problem, to which the flagellants responded with an even harsher penance. Moving from place to place, they performed the involuntary role of walking pest holes. There were settlements unaffected by plague until they were visited by the flagellants. Carried by fleas or the blood of the flagellants, the disease found a favorable environment for spreading.

The flagellants of the plague practiced the teachings of Saint Francis to the extreme, but also those of Joachim of Fiore; for many of them this was a sign

that the Age of the Spirit was about to begin. Flagellation turned into a phenomenon as great and holy as the First Crusade: it was not initiated by a prince or a cleric, but by God himself. There was no leadership, organization or unitary structure. Although the processions were led by bishops or monks, anyone who desired could join them. Thousands of people gathered singing, wearing crosses and inscriptions, and marching on the streets whipping themselves. [296] These scenes caused such frenzy that people reconciled, paid their debts, publicly confessed their sins, stolen goods were being returned and slaves and convicts were freed. The place visited by the flagellants turned into a magic social theater and a source of legends: the audience thronged to soften their robes in the blood of the flagellants believed to have curative and spiritual properties. It was said that the flagellants could absolve sins and that they managed to make a cow to speak, but at Strasbourg they tried in vain to bring back to life a dead child. [297] Such stories only increased the contrast between the holiness of the flagellants and the opulence of the clergy.

The flagellation was not only a way of individual salvation, but also a method to save the world from God's fury. According to a chronicle of the city of Speyer, the local flagellants justified their activity through a letter allegedly brought by an angel from Jerusalem. God was angry and he wished to destroy the world. Only if people flagellated their bodies for 33.3 days (each day signifying a year of the earthly life of Jesus according to Dionysius Exiguus) could they make peace with God. [298]

In 1316, influenced by Joachim's ideas, German flagellants turned the 33.3 days of penance and marching into 33.3 years of waiting for the Second Coming. [299] Some claimed that they could resurrect Emperor Frederick II, who would overthrow the Papacy and bring an age of social justice. The flagellant Konrad Schmidt went even further: he pretended to be Frederick the resurrected. [300] He baptized himself in the blood of his followers and in the work *Prophetica* he announced the end of the world in the year 1369. But the Inquisition burned him at the stake and the flagellants were eventually banned through a papal bull. [301]

4.2.5. The Great Western Schism and the prophecies of the popes

The catastrophes of the 13th and 14th centuries had a baleful effect on church authority. The writings of the period lament the decadence of the institution of God and speak about monks and priests in the roughest terms: “they [the priests] frequent brothels and taverns, and spend their time in drinking, revelling, and gambling, fight and brawl in their cups, and with their polluted lips blaspheme the name of God and the saints, and from the embraces of prostitutes hurry to the altar.” [302] Geoffrey Chaucer, in his pilgrimages to Canterbury, offers details about the price of a monk from his time. Bishops sold licenses to priests so that they could keep concubines. Many popes were never elected as representatives of Christ if free elections were held and if money did not talk instead of the voters. But money was not always enough; and this thing was best noticed during the Great Western Schism.

The Great Western Schism, which took place between 1378 and 1417, manifested itself only within Catholicism and, as the Great Schism in the 11th century, was not caused by theological issues, but by political ones. In 1309 the seat of the Papacy was transferred from Rome to Avignon, where seven popes succeeded until 1378. At the death of Gregory XI the citizens of Rome protested against the election of a new French pope in Avignon and constrained the bishops to choose an Italian pope in the person of Urban VI. But the French cardinals refused to recognize Urban VI, declared the election null and named Clement VII as pope. Clement settled in Avignon, while Urban remained in Rome. In this situation Western Christendom could not decide who to listen to; some nations acknowledged Urban, others Clement. The scene of the two rival popes, each one claiming to be the true successor of Saint Peter, continued for approximately 40 years and damaged the institution of the Papacy more than any other event. The schism was finally solved through the Council of Constance (1414-1418). At the council three popes – from Avignon, Rome and Pisa – claimed the papal legitimacy, but all three were deprived of their power in favor of Pope Martin V.

The schism caused confusion in the Latin world. Urbanist and Clementine bishops disputed their legitimacy in the dioceses of Vreslau, Mainz, Liege, Basel, Lübeck and Constance. This situation led to the cessation of the public processions. Both sides accused each other of blasphemy. The schism chiefly involved a financial effort and stress of the Catholic Church as a whole, but it was felt the most by parishioners. Unlike other periods, the popes of the

schisms were poor because the rupture diminished the flow of money poured into the papal coffers. Desperate, the popes extorted the bishops, the bishops extorted the priests, and finally the priests extorted the parishioners. In the battle for supremacy the rival popes offered gifts to princes and kings in exchange for support, narrowed the freedoms of the institution they represented and subjected themselves to public humiliations.

The sin of simony – buying the hierarchical place in the church – was not a novelty at the time of the schism. On the contrary; it was a sort of silent tradition practiced for hundreds of years. But the seats of cardinal were limited, and there could be only one pope. When money proved to be an insufficient means of manipulation, people used divine legitimacy. On the one hand, there were the small revelations, such as the one of Marie Robine in the French region of Gascogne. She claimed that Pope Clement VI (d.1314) miraculously cured her in 1378 and a series of subsequent visions indicated the divine legitimacy of the Papacy of Avignon (which recompensed her with an annual pension of 60 florins). [303] On the other hand, the prophecies about popes appeared; these were the heavy artillery of the political arsenal. The Franciscans and the Joachimites believed that this degrading scandal would be miraculously solved through the saving intervention of the angelic pope. This was the case of the prophecy ascribed to the Franciscan Tommasuccio of Foligno. A native of the region of Umbria, Tommasuccio died in 1377, shortly before the outbreak of the schism. Allegedly, during the schism his prophecy was found, which said that “one from beyond the mountains shall become the Vicar of God,” he would solve the schism, he would renew the church and he would bring universal peace. The phrase “from beyond the mountains” was a clear reference to the Alps, the mountains between Italy and France, or between Rome and Avignon. Most likely the prophecy was written by an Italian Franciscan who had knowledge about the moral squalor of Rome’s clergy and wished to favor the French popes. Tommasuccio’s prophecy also said that the angelic pope would rise “about twelve years after the millennium will have passed,” which was recently interpreted as referring to the year 2012 (and the Maya prophecy). [304]

Another papal prophecy was *Vaticinia de Summis Pontificibus* , a Latin manuscript which appeared at the end of the 13th century. This text

enumerates portraits of popes and prophecies linked to each of them starting with Pope Nicholas III (d.1280) until the arrival of an angelic pope. Today, the series of 30 prophecies, based on Greek prototypes, are believed to have been written as a way of instigating to ecclesiastical reform, but also to influence the papal elections to the detriment of the candidates supported by the powerful Orsini family. The fact that it suggests in one way or another when the end of the world would happen is only a side effect of this prophecy. Besides, the prophecy was formulated in such a manner that it was supposed to have an immediate influence; the end of the world was placed in a very distant and obscure future.

Initially, *Vaticinia de Summis Pontificibus* was known after its *incipit* as *Genus nequam* . It combines fantasy and mystical messages with an alleged chronology of the popes. Every prophecy of the series is made up of four elements: an enigmatic allegorical text, an emblematic image, and a motto – all assigned to a pope. The *Genus nequam* series enjoyed widespread circulation in the 14th century and it was complemented with even more prophecies through the propagandistic *incipit Ascende calve* . These texts sat at the basis of many commentaries, interpretations, but also at the fabrication of subsequent papal prophecies such as *Liber de Flore sive de summis ponticifibus* . This starts with the depiction of the historical popes (Gregory IX, d.1241), cites a couple of groups of popes from *Genus nequam* , but also adds details about the person and the political agenda of each pope.

Until the Council of Constance *Genus nequam* and *Ascende calve* had been united under the name of *Vaticinia de Summis Pontificibus* and they were wrongly ascribed (or intentionally to grant them legitimacy) to Joachim of Fiore. *Vaticinia de Summis Pontificibus* was probably inspired by the Tiburtine Sibyl and *Vaticinium Severi et Leonis imperatorum* ; the latter was a prophecy about the coming of the messianic emperor on the throne of the Byzantine Empire falsely ascribed to Emperor Leo VI (d.912). [305] It was also speculated that *Vaticinia de Summis Pontificibus* refers to cardinals, not to popes. [306] Due to the fact that the prophecy supports the idea of the messianic emperor and the angelic pope, it was probably created by the Franciscans, who tried to influence certain papal elections.

Today, the most famous prophecy about popes is that of Malachy: a list of

112 short phrases in Latin – mottos designed to define the origins or the essence of the mandate of each pope (together with a few antipopes) until the end of the world. There is no reference about a calendrical date, name or a place; each phrase expresses something generic. The list of mottos starts with a phrase representative for Pope Celestine II (d.1144) and ends with a pope described as "Peter the Roman," whose pontificate would witness the destruction of Rome.

The prophecy of Malachy was published for the first time by the Benedictine monk Arnold of Wyon in 1595 in Venice, as part of his book *Lignum Vitae* . Wyon ascribed the list to Saint Malachy, a 12th-century Irish archbishop of Armagh, [307] and named it *Prophetia Sancti Malachiae Archiepiscopi, de Summis Pontificibus* . [308] According to legend, in 1139 the archbishop went to present the state of the church from his country to Pope Innocent II. While he was in Rome, Malachy had a vision about the future of the Catholic Church and all the popes who would follow from that moment until the end of times. Malachy recorded what he had found by describing in a couple of Latin words each supreme pontiff. Allegedly, he entrusted the document to Innocent, who deposited it in the archive of the Vatican. Thus, the prophetic text was practically forgotten for four centuries, when it was brought again to light by Arnold of Wyon. [309]

The interpretation of the prophetic list was based on finding connections between the mottos and the popes' birth places, personal logos, or events within the pontificate. For example, the first motto, *Ex castro Tiberis* ("From a Castle on the Tiber River"), suits Pope Celestine II, who was born at Città di Castello, Perugia, on the Tiber. [310] Other interesting coincidences are those referring to Urban VIII (d.1644), characterized through the words *Lilium et Rosa* ("Lily and Rose"). Urban was born in Florence, a city whose symbol is the lily; three flowers of this kind were engraved on his papal emblem as well. Moreover, during his pontificate France (the lily) allied with England (having as a symbol the rose) in the Thirty Years' War. [311] Pius VII (d.1823) is described as *Aquilla rapax* ("Rapacious Eagle"), a possible reference to the fact that during his rule the Papal States were invaded by the armies of Napoleon, which had as coat of arms the imperial eagle. [312] Leon XIII (d.1903) is defined as *Lumen in caelo* ("Light in the Sky"), and his mandate is seen today as one of the brightest in the history of the Catholic

Church. [313]

Even though the hypothesis that the manuscript was hidden (or forgotten) in the archives of the Vatican is plausible, in reality this is not prophetic, but political. The abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, Malachy's biographer and contemporary, mentioned nothing about a prophecy of Malachy and there was no information about the existence of this text before its publication in 1595. [314] The prophecy seems to be mentioned for the first time in a written narration of the Spanish Dominican Alphonsus Ciacconius in 1590, a narration that five years later was published by Wyon. Ciacconius commented only on the prophecies up to Pope Urban VII (whose mandate lasted until 1590, and he was still a pontiff at the time of making the commentaries). Ciacconius was a powerful man, and he might have been lured to comment on the prophecies by someone who wanted the cardinal Girolamo Simoncelli to be elected pope. By clearly depicting the papal list and the corresponding mottos up to that moment, the conspirators relied on the fact that the next papal references in the list would be considered true by the elite of the church. After Urban VII the prophecy speaks about a pope *Ex antiquitate urbis* ("From the Ancient City"). This aspect suited Simoncelli, at the time cardinal at Orvieto (which literally means "old city," Latin: *Urbs vetus*). But the conclave chose the Milanese Niccolò Sfondrato, named afterward "Gregory XIV." The Spanish writer Benito Geronimo Feyjoó y Montenegro compared the papal list with the list of the Byzantine emperors *Vaticinium Severi et Leonis imperatorum* and he concluded that both texts are apocryphal, written for political purposes. [315] The French Jesuit Claude-François Menestrier also contended that the prophecy of the popes is a fake, pointing out, among other arguments, that the prophecies were mentioned neither in the original 1601 edition of Ciacconius's *Vitae, et res gestae pontificium romanorum* nor in the later editions of 1630 and 1677. [316]

The list of Malachy can be easily divided into two parts, according to the year of its public appearance: the 74 popes and antipopes prior to 1590 and the 38 popes after 1590. For most of the pontificates prior to 1590 the prophetic messages refer only to aspects or characteristics of the popes prior to taking the office: birthplace, nickname, coat of arms, family or the place where they were cardinals. Instead, after 1590 Malachy's list and reality can be linked only if all possible aspects, both before and during the pontificate, are taken

into account. The references in the document are very obscure, the correlation between the list and the real popes is precarious and, most importantly, the prophetic interpretations have never led to the precise anticipation of the future pontiff.

At the start of the 21st century Malachy's list came to public attention because it was going to end. The German Joseph Ratzinger, elected Pope Benedict XVI in 2005, was the last but one pope according to the list. Of the 112 popes, 111 are described in two or three words. By contrast, the last pope is described through a long phrase that suggests the occurrence of the end of the world: "In the final persecution of the Holy Roman Church, there will sit Peter the Roman, who will pasture his sheep in many tribulations, and when these things are finished, the city of seven hills will be destroyed, and the dreadful judge will judge his people. The end." [317]

Historically, Peter the Apostle (also named "Petrus I") is considered the first bishop of Rome and even the first pope. The name "Peter the Roman" in Malachy's list refers to a second Peter. But in March 2013 the Argentine Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected pope. He took the papal name of "Francis" (after Saint Francis of Assisi), and his papal motto, his coat of arms or his place of origin – there is nothing which might indicate a connection with Peter the Apostle. Hence, Peter the Roman might be a fruit of the medieval views about the circular and proportional Universe, which begins and ends with the same element or the same event. Peter is analogous to Christ. The church began with the arrival of Christ and it will end through the arrival of Christ. Likewise, Christ handed the keys of the church to Peter at the First Coming (Matthew 16:19) and he will take them back (from Peter) at the Second Coming.

4.2.6. The astrological ascension

Our prehistoric ancestors had no clue where we came from, who we are, how our Universe came to be and how it works. But, compared to animals, they had an advantage in the struggle for survival: intelligence, especially our gift for pattern recognition.

Man has always been covered by a blanket of stars, and the first people used the gift of pattern recognition for reading the heavenly calendar. The

messages written in the stars told our forefathers when to camp, how much time to sit in one place, when to move on, when rain, cold or the migratory animals would come. Thus, when they observed the connection between the motions of the stars and the seasonal cycles of life on Earth, they concluded that what happens up there must be directed at us down here. The problem is that the human ability to recognize patterns is like a double-edged sword; the mind also sees patterns where there are none (a psychological phenomenon called “pareidolia”). In addition to the regular movements of celestial bodies, our ancestors also saw in the position of the stars figures of animals, mythical creatures or plants. Long before the invention of the telescope, ancient cultures from around the globe looked up at the same stars and they made the same mistake: they believed that the sky is an extraordinary providential spectacle. The only difference among them was how they interpreted celestial phenomena. This is how astrology began.

Astrology is an immemorial practice that, in a sense, helped our ancestors organize chaos and make the Universe intelligible. Unlike the other forms of divination, astrology has been the most used form of divination because the opening of the sky is accessible to all people. Nevertheless, the Mosaic Law associated astrology with the sinful traditions of the neighboring pagan nations and it prohibited it (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). [318] Hence, the early Christians adopted the same position. Unlike numerology, which was encouraged by the mystery of the number 666, astrology was condemned alongside all the other forms of divination. Augustine said that astrology is a great delusion, [319] for Lactantius it was a creation of the fallen angels, [320] Hippolytus said that only madmen practice it [321] and Tertullian saw it as idolatry. [322] Astrology was rejected indeed, but it did not die. As the Christian religion suffered transformations and schisms, the doctrinal gaps were filled with mystical elements. In this way astrology and numerology became alternative ways in searching for God. In the 14th century prelates, princes and commoners together were large consumers of astrology, and if they did not practice it themselves, they used the services of astrologers.

The European astrological system was based on the cosmological model of Aristotle [323] and Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* ; the latter was a continuation of the Hellenistic and Babylonian traditions. At the core of the astrological system sits the metaphysical principle of the integration in the totality of the cosmos.

The individual, the earth and the environment are seen as a single organism, all part of a whole, in a relation of interdependence. Mathematical relations express qualities and "tones" of energy that manifest themselves through numbers, angles, forms and sounds, all connected to a divine pattern of proportions. In the Middle Ages people had a bi-dimensional (two-dimensional) representation of heaven, a context in which astrology made sense. But in a tri-dimensional Universe, as it has been seen since the 18th century, astrology is an absurdity.

According to Genesis, the entire Creation of God revolves around one single entity: man. Man is the most important part of God's work and the center of all things. But, according to medieval thinkers, man is not only in the center of God's spiritual plans, he is also in the geometrical center of Creation. From the ground all celestial bodies seem to revolve around Earth, and thus all Creation relates to man. To explain this movement, Earth was believed to be surrounded by eight invisible spheres and absolutely all celestial objects were arranged on these spheres according to a well-established divine plan. Each of the seven known planets at the time (the Sun and the Moon were considered planets) were positioned on a sphere, while the fixed stars, the constellations and the mobile stars were all positioned on the last sphere. This last sphere was also divided into 12 constellations, symbolized through the 12 signs of the zodiac. Subsequently, each planet had its own energies and features, which could be affected in a unique way by every zodiacal sign. [324] Likewise, every zodiacal sign was associated with one of the basic elements of the material world: fire, water, earth and air; it was enclosed in one of the three basic qualities: cardinal, fixed or mutable; and it was associated with a coverage area: personal, social and universal. [325]

According to the Hermetic maxim "as above, so below," there was a symmetry between the individual as microcosm and the celestial environment as macrocosm. [326] The image of heaven mirrored the image of the earth, and vice versa. This magical connection between heaven and the earth made the astral manifestations be seen as encoded divine messages about past, present and future earthly events. In fact, the connection between luminaries and the world was hard, if not impossible, to ignore, given the fact that the Christian scriptures in many places actually support the divine legitimacy of astrology. For example, the gospels depict how the birth of the Savior was accompanied

by a grandiose celestial event, apparently a conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn, while in the Book of Revelation the Sun turns dark, the Moon turns red and the stars fall from the sky. So, it was believed that those who succeed to understand and decipher the evolution of celestial bodies come to know God's plans for mankind.

The medieval scholars also believed that God literally resides behind the clouds and the last celestial sphere; for them, "heaven" (firmament) and "Heaven" (Paradise) was one and the same thing. Christ physically ascended to Heaven – a miracle interpreted as an actual movement behind the last sphere. By contrast, inside this simple-structured universe the devil had an ambiguous positioning. The medieval mindset was built around the struggle between the supernatural and opposite forces of good and evil, which were spiritually and materially symmetrical. Each of these forces had to have a realm of their own, while the earth was the battleground between the two. And if God was already placed up in heaven, from where he watches everything, the geometrical place of the devil had to be down, inside the earth. This is why Hell was placed in the depths and it has been usually depicted as a complex of caverns or an underground city filled with fire.

Apocalyptic astrology was mainly based on the technique of comparative horoscopy – the comparison of future planetary configurations with those accompanying known past events. Through calculations, astrologers aimed to discover if major earthly events from the past (such as the creation of Adam, Noah's Flood or the incarnation of Christ) were accompanied by unusual celestial events (planetary conjunctions, eclipses, comet appearances). In case a connection was found between a heavenly event and an earthly one, the discovered pattern was applied to the future. This was the crude image of 11th-century astrology and until the 18th century, when it was separated from astronomy and science, it largely remained the same.

The divine letters in the 11th century were among the first astrological apocalyptic manifestations. If visions could have been contested as simple dreams or satanic deceptions, manuscripts signed "Jesus Christ" or "Michael the Archangel" were palpable proofs of God's intervention in the world. Divine letters, such as those of Peter the Hermit or Stephen of Cloyes, enjoyed great fame even though they greatly varied both in terms of message,

length, style or supposed author. Sometimes the purpose of these letters was to empower their possessors, other times they carried a political or religious message, while other times they announced the end of the world on different dates and on different bases. The English chroniclers Roger of Hoveden and Benedict of Peterborough and the French chronicler Rigord spoke about four circular letters that expressed concerns regarding the conjunction of the seven planets in the constellation of Libra in September 1186. The first letter was authored by a certain Corumphiza, and it announced disasters for the Arabs. The second was from "William, the clerk to the constable of Chester," and it announced the victory of Christendom over Islam. The third came from the monk Anselm of Winchester and it related about a lay brother who had entered a state of trance and recited Latin verses about the horrible things that were about to happen on the occasion of the conjunction. And the fourth was addressed by the astrologer Johannes Tolentanus to Pope Clement III and it claimed that the world was going to be destroyed through wind and storms, drought and famine, pestilence and earthquake. People were advised to leave their homes and find safety in mountains and caverns. [327]

The letters caused alarm and the people reacted as best as they could. The Byzantine emperor Isaac II Angelus bricked up the windows of his castle, and in England the archbishop of Canterbury ordered a three-day fast to prevent the calamity. [328] Versions of the letters continued to circulate for centuries, with altered names and dates. At the end of the 14th century some texts were ascribed to the *magisters* (master prelates) in Paris and they announced great catastrophes for the period 1448-1510. A text even spoke about a Roman emperor who would besiege Jerusalem for seven years, he would make war with Muslims and defeat them, and in 1516 the Antichrist would rise. [329]

The Persian astrologer Albumasar was one of the most important sources for the medieval European astrology. The 13th-century poem *De vetula* – falsely ascribed to the Roman poet Ovidius – made references to Albumasar's theories and it correlated the birth of major religions with the conjunctions between Saturn and Jupiter. In *Opus Maius* (1266) Roger Bacon reproduced Albumasar's theories, therewith addressing to Pope Clement IV an urge to accept astrology as an instrument of prophetic enlightenment: "I know that if the Church should be willing to consider the sacred text and prophecies ...

and should order a study of the paths of astronomy, it would gain some idea of greater certainty regarding the time of Antichrist." [330] Bacon, a supporter of Joachim of Fiore, believed that there would be only six major religions in the history of mankind, each one symbolized at astrological level by the conjunction of Jupiter, the patron of all religions, with the other six planets: Judaism (Jupiter and Saturn), Chaldean (Jupiter and Mars), Egyptian (Jupiter and the Sun), Islam (Jupiter and Venus) and Christianity (Jupiter and Mercury). [331] The first five religions had already appeared; only the religion governed by the conjunction of Jupiter with the Moon did not yet appear. Given the fact that the darkness of the night was considered the devil's playground, the celestial body of the night had evil connotations. So, the last religion was about to be established by the Antichrist. [332]

During the Great Western Schism the astrological universe was dominated by the manuscript *Tabulae Alphonsinae* . This was named after Alfonso X of Castile, but in fact it was produced in the 1320s by the Parisian astrologers influenced by Joachimism. [333] *Tabulae Alphonsinae* incorporated a number of astrological innovations regarding the double movements of the fixed stars, of the planetary apogees and the eighth sphere, and at the same time it offered a basis for a new set of apocalyptic speculations.

The medieval astrologers noticed that the eighth sphere, which contains the fixed stars and the planetary apogees, does a very slow circular movement eastward. This movement was known from the time of Hipparchus of Nicaea in the 2nd century, but the calculation of the exact ratio of the motion was a constant source of controversy. *Tabulae Alphonsinae* set a complete rotation of 360 degrees of the eighth sphere over a period of 49,000 years, a period called *Annus Magnus* (the "Great Year"). It is unclear where this number came from, but it might have a connection with the mystical significance of the number 7 and the millennial week (7 x 7,000 = 49,000). [334]

The Italian astrologer Petri d'Abano, using the millennial week and the theories of Joachim of Fiore, explained how the decreasing duration of life of the people was in relation to the movement of the constellations in the zodiac. After he divided the history of the world into three parts, d'Abano showed that the age of man is destined to gradually be reduced from the maximum of 1,200 years – as it was in the beginning under the sign of Sagittarius – until

the age of 75. The world was meant to be dominated by every zodiacal sign for a period of 500 years each. Thus, the end of the world was to come under the baleful sign of Scorpio, when the cycle of the zodiacal signs and the 6,000 years of existence of the world were completed. [335]

When the Joachimite Arnald of Villanova boldly stated that the Antichrist would rise in 1378, the Parisian Dominican Jean of Soardis vehemently disapproved him in the treaty *De Antichristo* (1300). He contested the possibility of knowing the date of the Antichrist's coming, no matter if it was based on the scripture, revelation or astrology. But Jean of Soardis was an ardent astrologer himself; he believed he could find a way to determine the end of the world by calculating the movements of the eighth sphere in relation to the age of the world and the position of the solar apogee. He assumed that the planets were created in their "optimum condition," with the Sun in the constellation of Aries at 15 degrees, position in which the celestial body has its sovereignty, exaltation and force. The solar apogee in the constellation of Aries at 15 degrees at the moment of the Creation was also supported by the belief that Paradise was actually positioned on the earth somewhere under the constellation of Aries toward the east. Jean of Soardis also accepted the Ptolemaic model with a rate of precession of one degree at 100 years for the fixed stars and planetary apogees, and a solar apogee in the constellation of Gemini of six degrees in the 2nd century. Starting from these assumptions, it was a matter of simple arithmetic the calculation of the 5,100 years that passed between the Creation and the time of Ptolemy (130 AD), because the solar apogee moved 51 degrees. This meant that precisely 5,000 years had passed between the time of Adam and the baptism of Christ, and therefore 1300 *Anno Domini* was equal to 6300 *Anno Mundi* . [336]

The French cardinal Pierre d'Ailly used *Tabulae Alphonsinae* to determine if the Great Western Schism was a sign of the coming of the Antichrist. [337] An adherent of Joachimism, in *Imago Mundi* (1410) d'Ailly said that the Indies can be reached by boat through the west as well. The cardinal's views influenced Christopher Columbus in his estimates about the size of the land and encouraged him in the decision to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Columbus held a copy of *Imago Mundi* during his journeys and many speculations of d'Ailly were taken by the admiral in the work *El libro de las profecías* . [338]

D’Ailly was cautious about astrology; the results obtained from astrological observations and calculations were not considered absolutely true. He admitted that there is a harmony between astrology, history and theology, but he also noticed that there had been numerous moments in history when the position of celestial bodies indicated events or states that did not materialize. Hence, d’Ailly concluded that the influence of celestial bodies does not cancel the free will held by people as a gift from God, and consequently the two things are not incompatible. More precisely, the heavenly map does not signify events that will necessarily happen, but events that will happen if the world continues on the same path.

In Albumasar’s *De magnis coniunctionibus* the cardinal found out that the revolutions of the eighth sphere and the conjunctions between Jupiter and Saturn indicate great changes in the world. Albumasar and *Tabulae Alphonsinae* helped d’Ailly conclude that the incarnation of Jesus was marked by a conjunction between Saturn and Jupiter, a “station” of the eighth sphere and the completion of ten movements of revolution of Saturn. [339] Accordingly, the repetition of all these signs in 1789 could only mean the occurrence of an event of equal importance: Parousia. In reality, in 1789 began the French Revolution. For d’Ailly it was important that the end was delayed for a couple of centuries, and therefore the Great Western Schism was rather an opportunity for reform and not a product of the Antichrist and his agents. Although the astrological signs for 1414 were gloomy, the placement of the Antichrist over 400 years gave hope to the cardinal that the Council of Constance was going to succeed in its mission. [340] But there was no time to lose, because the free will and the attitude of people could delay or accelerate the coming of the Antichrist. The church had to be reformed and peace had to be reestablished. Although God directly acts upon the heavens, ultimately the human actions are those that determine the future. [341]

In the 15th century the theories of d’Ailly were adopted by Jean de Bruges, an astrologer interested to link the vision of the end with the troubles of his own time. Unlike d’Ailly, De Bruges almost entirely ignored the movements of the eighth sphere and focused instead on historical ages of 240 years determined by the conjunctions Saturn-Jupiter within triplicities. [342] The Water Triplicity and the Earth Triplicity are in opposition to each other and they signal opposite effects for the people of God. The Fire Triplicity and the

Air Triplicity are also in opposition to each other and they mark periods of transition and equilibrium between the extreme triplicities of water and earth. Each triplicity brought its own contribution to mankind's destiny. The Earth Triplicity ruled at the time of Abraham, David and the prophets, of Christ or the doctors of the Church (the first five centuries). By contrast, the rule of watery signs marked the Egyptian enslavement of the Israelites, the false prophet Nimrod and the Babylonian captivity, the arrival of Muhammad, the Great Schism between the East and the West and the Great Western Schism. Since the Earth Triplicity saw the birth of Christ, De Bruges expected the Antichrist to rise under the sign of water in 1460, when a conjunction of Saturn with Jupiter and the completion of the so-called maximum years of the Sun (the planet of the Christian religion) was about to take place. Pisces is in direct opposition with Virgo, the zodiacal sign in which Saturn and Jupiter were in conjunction at the time of Christ's birth. However, the destruction of Christendom would not bring the destruction of the world. The French astrologer had a circular view about the existential extremities of the world. The world was created in the Fire Triplicity and, according to Revelation 8:5-8, it would be ended through fire. As a conjunction of the two planets in the Water Triplicity signaled Noah's Flood, in the same way the return to the Fire Triplicity would bring a flood of fire. He calculated that the next Saturn-Jupiter conjunction in the Fire Triplicity would take place around the year 1765, close to the year advanced by d'Ailly for the end of the world. [343]

5. THE APOCALYPSES OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

5.1. THE PAPAL DEMONIZATION AND THE RISE OF HISTORICISM

Revolts occur when there is a rupture between leaders and their subjects. In 1510 the German monk Martin Luther suffered a shock after he traveled to Rome and saw the stage of ecclesiastical corruption: Sixtus IV was the first pope who imposed a license on brothels, a special tax on the priests who had a concubine, and established the selling of indulgences [344] to be applied to the dead as well. In turn, Pope Alexander IV fathered seven children and simultaneously fostered two mistresses. After he returned to Wittenberg at the end of 1517, disgusted and resentful, Luther conceived a list entitled *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum* and nailed it on the door of All Saints' Church. The list of 95 theses was a summary of his grievances, through which he mainly requested a reopening of the debates regarding the selling of indulgences, the concepts of Purgatory, individual Judgment, Mariology (the devotion to the Virgin Mary), the worship of the saints, most of the sacraments and the authority of the Papacy. The *Ninety-Five Theses* (as the document remained known in history) enjoyed a powerful support from laity and some clerics and it thus marked the eruption of a widespread force of dissatisfaction. This movement was called the "Protestant Reformation" and its purpose was to doctrinally reorganize the Catholic Church by eliminating the false teachings, punishing the ecclesiastical crimes and stopping the sale of indulgences. [345]

Five things greatly favored the start and the widespread of the Protestant Reformation. The first was the inability of the Catholic Church to purify itself. The Council of Constance in 1414-1417, through which the Great Western Schism was ended, changed nothing to the powers and attributions of the Papacy. And after the Czech reformer Jan Hus was assassinated at the council, the citizens of the region of Bohemia began the Hussite Wars [346] and rebelled against the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. The second was the printing press, invented in 1436 by the German blacksmith Johannes

Gutenberg. This brilliant object, by speeding the exchange of ideas and information, stimulated debates in the academic world regarding the freedom of thought, the nature of the church and the source and the extension of the religious and secular authorities. The third was the Islamic threat. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 the Ottoman Empire continued to advance in Europe, while the Western leaders were not capable to offer an adequate reaction to this issue. The fourth was the political instability of the Holy Roman Empire. The Reformation manifested itself predominantly in the German regions because many princes and local dukes saw it as a chance to contest the hegemony of the German emperor. [347] And the fifth was the natural elements: floods, astral signs and epidemics. The Black Plague undermined the credibility of the church as the representative of God and it subsequently encouraged the reorganization of the European economy and society.

While Luther led the Reformation in the German regions, Huldrych Zwingli activated in Switzerland. Initially, John Calvin had a leading role in France, but due to persecution he sought refuge in Switzerland. Even though the three had similar points of view, the Reformist groups never reached a consensus. This thing fragmented and weakened the Reformation, and the rift between the three leaders led to the establishment of rival Protestant churches: the Lutheran Church, the Reformed Church, the Calvinist Church or the Presbyterian Church. Most of the Zwinglians believed that the Reformation was too conservative and accordingly they adopted more radical positions. The Protestants that took the example of the Dutch theologian Desiderius Erasmus formed groups outside of the churches, guided by mysticism and humanism. [348] Older Protestant churches, such as the Moravian Church, date their origins in the works of Jan Hus and the Hussite Wars of the 15th century. And in other parts, the causes, the effects and the processes of the religious reform were different, the Anglican Church being established through the English Reformation.

A classification of the groups and teachings of the Reformation is almost impossible due to the social and doctrinal effervescence, but the most general categorization speaks about two main sides of the Protestant Reformation: the Magisterial Reformation and the Radical Reformation.

The Magisterial Reformation comprises the main Protestant groups. Luther, Calvin and Zwingli are considered magisterial reformers because their movements were supported by the leading authorities of many cities called "magistrates" (Latin: *magister*). Frederick the Wise, for example, the Elector of Saxony, was a devout Catholic; nevertheless, he protected Luther hoping that he would obtain more political autonomy in relation to the church. Zwingli and Calvin were supported by the city councils of Zürich and Geneva. [349]

On the other hand, the Radical Reformation sheltered under its umbrella fanatical, apocalyptic and annihilationist groups, not tolerated even by the leaders of the Magisterial Reformation. The Radical Reformation was intended to be an answer to the corruption of the Catholic Church and to the unlawful expansion of the magisterial Protestantism as well. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were often categorized by the radical reformers as the "new papists." Most of the radical sects were generically called "Anabaptist" (Romanized Greek: *ana* – "over again"; *baptizes* – "to baptize") because their common ground was the denial of infant baptism. According to Philip Melanchthon, Luther's close friend, the anabaptist movement was initiated by the triad of the weaver prophets in the city of Zwickau: Nikolaus Storch, Thomas Drechsel and Markus Stübner. [350] Other anabaptist personalities were Thomas Müntzer, an important leader of the German Peasants' War, [351] Melchior Hoffman, an illiterate furrier from the region of Swabia who self-styled himself a prophet, [352] or Jan Matthys and Jan van Leyden, who established an utopia in the city of Münster. [353] Driven by the belief that the Millennium was imminent, the Anabaptists contested the feudal and monarchical systems, based on social inequality, which dominated 16th-century Europe and they tried to create their own parallel societies. Although their approach varied between extreme pacifism and cleansing the earth by sword, in general the Anabaptists were perceived as a threat to the established order and accordingly they were marginalized. This aspect forced them to emigrate alongside the English Puritans and other radical groups in America, where they established colonies and freely put into practice their utopian aspirations. Today, some of the groups that descended from the European Anabaptism [354] are the Amish, the Hutterites or the Mennonites. [355]

The Protestants extensively used in their studies the early apocalyptic works,

especially the amillenarist-historicist perspective of Augustine in which the Millennium is understood symbolically and the Book of Revelation is a representation of the history of the church. Based on Daniel's prophecies and Revelation, a new interpretation to the history of the church and the dissolution of the Roman Empire was established. The "stone cut out without hands, which smote the image upon its feet" from Daniel 2 and the "little horn" from Daniel 7 are two distinct and opposite entities. The stone comes from God, while the horn expresses adversity against God. In the 2nd century Irenaeus misidentified the stone with the Second Coming. The Protestants, on the other hand, said it represents the First Coming of Jesus and his divine work, while the fragmentation of the image's toes and feet symbolize the dissolution of the Western Roman Empire as a result of the internal struggles caused by the emergence of Christendom.

History confirms that the Roman Empire did not collapse only because of the external pressures exercised by barbarians, but especially due to the inner conflicts. [356] A great civilization collapsed, but a new era began. The transformation of the "stone" into a "great mountain" represents the evolution of the Christian religion. Since the ascension of Jesus, Christendom continued to expand, culminating in the year 313 with its liberalization and acceptance through the Edict of Milan. Correlated with the Revelation of John, the visions of Daniel reveal that the church represents an incipient form of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that will meet the millennial stage after the event of Parousia and will be complete at the time of revealing the new heaven and the new earth (Daniel 2:44).

Protestants made a clear distinction between the "Church" (with capital letter) and the "church" (with lower-case letter). The "Church" (with capital letter) represents the unified faith of all Christians, the religion itself. Instead, the "church" (with lower-case letter) refers to the institution with ranks, hierarchy, buildings, taxes – things Jesus never spoke about. In this context, by combining the early apocalyptic doctrines with the anti-papal trend that manifested between the 12th and the 15th century, the "little horn" from Daniel 7:8, 20-26 was identified with the institutionalization and the corruption of the Church, which is the Papacy:

(1) "there came up among them another horn, a little one" (Daniel 7:8) – the

kingdom symbolized by the “little horn” rose among the other ten kingdoms (horns) of Western Europe. The geographic location of the Holy See is in Rome, Italy, right in the heart of Western Europe.

(2) “in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things” (Daniel 7:8) – this kingdom was going to be ruled by a man that would speak on its behalf. The institution of the Papacy is ruled by a pope who speaks on its behalf.

(3) “a fourth beast ... and it had ten horns ... there came up among them another horn, a little one” (Daniel 7:7-8) – because the fourth beast from Daniel 7 had already been identified with the Roman Empire by the early scholars, Protestants concluded that the empire dissolved into ten smaller kingdoms: the Burgundians, the Francs, the Germans, the Anglo-Saxons, the Visigoths, the Suevi, the Lombards, the Ostrogoths, the Heruls and the Vandals. Accordingly, the 11th kingdom, or the “little horn,” is the Papacy, which is a successor of the fourth beast. [357] Rome, the capital of the former Western Roman Empire, became the capital of Western Christendom. Daniel symbolizes four empires through four beasts, and John speaks about the Antichrist as the beast from the sea. The office of *Pontifex Maximus* was transferred from emperors to popes, and the Papacy became the ruler of the Western ecclesiastical empire (the Catholic Church).

(4) “the beast ... it had ten horns ... before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots” (Daniel 7:7-8) – the three horns put down by the “little horn” are symbols for the three nations – the Heruls, the Vandals and the Ostrogoths – destroyed by the Papacy with the help of mercenary armies and Christian kings. The Christian emperor Zeno arranged a treaty with the Ostrogoths in 487 which resulted in the eradication of the Heruls in 493. The Christian emperor Justinian exterminated the Vandals in 534. And the Ostrogoths lost the final battle with the Papacy in the year 538 and they were permanently expelled from the Italian Peninsula in 554. [358]

(5) “out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise: and another shall arise after them; and he shall be diverse from the former” (Daniel 7:24) – the Papacy was established in the middle of the 6th century, after the other ten nations mentioned above, as a derivation of the Bishopric of Rome. [359] It controlled the Papal States, a union of territories situated in the center of the Italian

Peninsula. The institution of the Papacy has been a combination of politics and religiousness, totally different from the other European states. Until the time of the Reformation the Papal States had behaved as a state in the real sense of the word: it had its own army and hired armies of mercenaries, its own administration, it conquered territories, it was involved in Europe's politics, it had the initiative of the crusades, excommunicated kings and reconciled emperors. It was, without a doubt, a privileged state among the kingdoms of Europe: "the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (Revelation 17:18). The Papacy exercised control over Europe's leaders by pretending submission in the name of God.

(6) "and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; ... and they shall be given into his hand" (Daniel 7:21, 25); "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (Revelation 13:7) – it is an undeniable historical fact that the Church of Rome killed throughout centuries around 50 million people on religious issues. It shed more blood than any other institution that has ever existed. [360]

(7) It will reign "and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time" (Daniel 7:25) – this period of years is mentioned seven times in the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation, expressed sometimes through 1,260 days or 42 months (Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). Based on the Jewish calendar, whose months have 30 days each, these periods indicate the same length of time: three and a half years, 42 months or 1,260 days. The 1,260 days represent 1,260 years, as it is shown in Ezekiel 4:6: "and shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it unto thee," or Numbers 14:34: "After the number of the days in which ye spied out the land, even forty days, for every day a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years." Thus, the "little horn" (identified with the Antichrist) had power over saints for 1,260 prophetic days, which were 1,260 literal years. [361] Protestants considered that the reign of the Papacy started in the 4th century, with the legalization of Christianity in the empire and the establishment of the Bishopric of Rome, which later turned into the Papacy. The Reformation and Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* , they believed, represented the fulfilling of the 1,260 years and the "deadly wound" suffered by the Papacy according to Revelation 13:3. The period of the persecution of the saints or the 1,260 years were correlated with

the great tribulation from Matthew 24:21, considered to be the most dreadful period experienced by the people of God. But later the Protestants of the 18th century repositioned the beginning of the Papacy in the year 538, when the last of the three kingdoms were destroyed. Thus, the 1,260 years were fulfilled in 1798, when the "deadly wound" was caused by Napoleon, who took Pope Pius VI prisoner.

(8) "And he shall speak words against the Most High ... and he shall think to change the times and the law" (Daniel 7:25); "and there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies... and he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God" (Revelation 13:5-6) – these verses refer to blasphemy. According to the Bible, blasphemy can manifest itself in two ways: pretending that you can forgive sins (Luke 5:21) and pretending that you are God (John 10:33). The Papacy claimed countless times that it can forgive sins, especially in exchange for money through indulgences. Even the title of "pope" – which comes from the Latin *papa* and it means "father" – is a blasphemy because it is contrary to the words of Jesus: "And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, [even] he who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9).

(9) "there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation" (Revelation 13:7) – this feature refers to a universal rule, a global governing body. The Papacy has never had a global rule, but it exercised its power over the nations of Western Europe through religion. The image of a global power is directly linked with the image of an apostate church that drinks the blood of all the saints and makes all nations drink the blood of its apostasy: "Babylon the great, that hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Revelation 14:8).

So, from a Protestant point of view the Antichrist was rather an impersonal entity, a system of apostasy and persecution. John even said about the Antichrist that "it will come," but at the same time he stated that in his time "arisen many antichrists" (1 John 2:18). [362] This meant that the malefic system was already at work. Nevertheless, the idea of an individual antichrist, molded on the fears of the 2nd and the 13th centuries, was not abandoned, but only modified: the Antichrist (a pope) was going to rule the world through the antichristical system of Catholicism. All the popes were seen as

antichrists or false prophets who maintained the antichristical system, and only the last pope, the most evil of all, was going to be the Antichrist. This had to stay on the papal chair for three and a half years, the great tribulation or the apogee of the 1,260 years of tribulation.

Augustine's point of view regarding the Millennium as a symbol for the history of the Church and Joachim's tripartite division of universal history helped the Protestants develop the eschatological school of "historicism" or the "historical interpretation of the biblical prophecies." More precisely, following the idea that there is a divine temporal and spatial symmetry, they made a historical equalization between the Old and the New Testament. The Old Testament describes the linear history of the Jewish people from the Creation until the time of Christ. Accordingly, the New Testament must, in the same way, depict the linear history of the Church. But due to the fact that the gospels and the epistles describe only the period of the first century of the Christian era, Protestants believed that the rest of the time until the end of the world is depicted by prophecies. In this way Christ became the axis of universal history, separating the Mosaic Covenant from the Church Covenant. The Book of Revelation is a description of the multisecular history of the Church and the biblical prophecies offer a religious significance to historical events. [363]

Luther and his contemporaries felt that they were living in the final acts of history because the words of Jesus about the Son of Perdition seemed to materialize in front of their eyes: [364]

> *I do not wish to force any one to believe as I do; neither will I permit anyone to deny me the right to believe that the last day is near at hand. These words and signs of Christ compel me to believe that such is the case. For the history of the centuries that have passed since the birth of Christ nowhere reveals conditions like those of the present. [365]*

For many centuries the Papacy and the Catholic Church had committed abuses, crimes and distorted the holy texts without anyone being able to stand against them. Although from the 11th century until the 16th century countless heretics and saints contested the Papacy and identified it with the devil, it could not be overthrown because the 1,260 years of domination were not fulfilled. But, when Luther nailed the *Ninety-Five Theses* , the Antichrist was

revealed in his true nature and the war between the true and the false church began.

The printing press allowed the cheap multiplication and spreading of information, thus helping the Protestants produce religious literature and to contour the Protestant doctrine. The theme of antagonism toward Catholicism can be distinguished in all the early Protestant writings. The most important texts were the confessions of faith, which represented the constitution of every new denomination. The Lutherans, the Calvinists or the Anabaptists – all identified the Papacy with the Antichrist in their confessions of faith. *Schmalkaldische Artikel* , a part of the work *Concordia* , represents a summary of the Lutheran doctrine, written by Luther in 1537 for a meeting of the Schmalkaldic League. In this Luther affirms:

> *This is a powerful demonstration that the pope is the real Antichrist who raised himself over and set himself against Christ, for the pope will not permit Christians to be saved except by his own power, which amounts to nothing since it is neither established nor commanded by God. This is actually what St. Paul calls exalting oneself over and against God. Neither the Turks nor the Tatars, great as is their enmity against Christians, do this; those who desire to do so they allow to believe in Christ, and they receive bodily tribute and obedience from Christians. However, the pope will not permit such faith but asserts that one must be obedient to him in order to be saved. This we are unwilling to do even if we have to die for it in God's name. All this is a consequence of his wishing to be the head of the Christian church by divine right. He had to set himself up as equal to and above Christ and to proclaim himself the head, and then the lord of the church, and finally of the whole world. He went so far as to claim to be an earthly god and even presumed to issue orders to the angels in heaven. ... Accordingly, just as we cannot adore the devil himself as our lord or God, so we cannot suffer his apostle, the pope or Antichrist, to govern us as our head or lord, for deception, murder, and the eternal destruction of body and soul are characteristic of his papal government, as I have demonstrated in many books.* *[366]*

Both the Protestant and the Catholics believed that the 16th century was close

to the end of the world, and both sides expected divine secrets and revelations to be discovered by them. Mathematics, astrology and non-theological tools heavily developed because they were overused at discerning the future. Due to the printing press, a large variety of popular prophetic notions freely circulated, alongside a flux of apocalyptic books and pamphlets. In this ocean of diverse teaching a current fed another and so on, as new observations and speculations came to surface. [367]

5.2. THE ASTROLOGICAL APOGEE

5.2.1. Planetary conjunctions, eclipses and the movements of the eighth sphere

In no other historical period has astrology gained greater power and influence than in the 16th and the 17th centuries. Amid the turmoil caused by the Protestant Reformation, conjunctions, eclipses, heavenly appearances and planetary movements became subjects that swallowed countless hours of observations and calculations, caused fierce debates and generated rivers of ink.

Astrology was considered capable of offering explanations about the birth, the development and the decline of all things that are part of the material world. It was the door toward a universe filled with beauty and harmony, in which the spiritual correspondences unite all things. Pierre d'Ailly named astrology "natural theology" because he saw the firmament as a map through which God informs mankind about the type and the time of certain future events. According to a witness of the time, everyone – from common people, doctors, commanders of troops, to popes, kings and emperors – saw themselves more or less dependent on the messages from the roof of heaven: [368]

> *astrology has become a recognized profession, and almost everyone has nativities drawn up ... [indeed], there is no cardinal or prelate or prince who does not have discourses drawn up telling his fortune based on his nativity ... Of course, only for secondary causes, because everything in the final analysis depends on God. [369]*

The scope of astrology expanded up to the point where it came in connection

with all known fields: botany, chemistry, zoology, mineralogy, anatomy or medicine. Colors, metals, stones, plants, medicines or the life of all kind of animals have been associated with one or more planets and placed under a spectrum of influence. In this way the entire realm of natural sciences has been transposed in astrological language with the purpose of seeing in all the natural phenomena signs about the future. At that time there was no difference between astronomy and astrology, or even between astrology and mathematics; until the Late Middle Ages astrologers were named *mathematici*. [370]

In the 16th century the importance of astrological events was still determined through the technique of comparative horoscopy (their comparison to past astrological configurations) and according to their rarity. It was a controversial technique, but widespread enough to cause panic when a planetary alignment occurred in the constellation of Pisces. In *Almanach nova plurimis annis venturis inserentia* (1499) Johannes Stöffler stated the followings:

> *In this year [1524] we shall see eclipse neither of sun nor moon. But in this year will occur positions of the planets well worthy of wonderment. For in the month of February will occur twenty conjunctions, small, mean and great, of which sixteen will occupy a watery sign, signifying to well nigh the whole world, climates, kingdoms, provinces, estates, dignitaries, brutes, beasts of the sea, and to all dwellers on earth indubitable mutation, variation and alternation such as we have scarce perceived form many centuries from historiographers and our elders. Lift up your heads, therefore, ye Christian men.* [371]

This short fragment gave rise to a rumor which said that in the year 1524 a second universal flood was going to take place. The planets involved in the great conjunction were Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, together with the Sun.

The prophecy of the flood was first and foremost contested by clerics because it violated God’s covenant with Noah. Other skeptics, such as Niccolò Machiavelli, George Tannstetter, Agostino Nifo or Paul of Middleburg, preferred to make jokes on the subject or refute it astrologically. [372] On the other hand, the Italian priest Sebastianus Constantinus of Taormina had the

courage to defend the prophecy of the flood. Indeed, a universal flood was impossible due to the divine promise, but a local one cannot be excluded, as a punishment from God. He emphasized that people are prone to the demonic temptation of ignoring divine signs, as it happened at the time of Noah. Divine warnings can come on the path of stars in the same way a star announced the three magi about the birth of the Savior. Hence, Constantinus concluded that it was better to follow the idea that there would be a flood than to believe that there would be none. [373]

Contested or supported, the prospect of dying by drowning was not an issue easy to ignore. In England, people feared that the flood, according to astrological calculations, would hit London on the 1st of February (in the Julian calendar). Around 20,000 people abandoned their homes in fear, while a prior turned his church into a fortress, apparently waterproof, within which he stuffed resources of food for a two-month waiting. In some port cities the population purchased small boats, while a certain Aurial built a giant ark at Toulouse, France. Likewise, Count Von Iggleheim, built a three-story ark on the Rhine. Unfortunately for Von Iggleheim, his construction drew the attention of the common people and fueled the frightful rumors. When a modest rain began to fall in the morning of the 1st of February, panic erupted and the curious crowd went berserk. The mob rushed on the docks to catch any objects that could float. At the sight of the desperate throng Von Iggleheim closed the door of his ark – a gesture that cost him dearly: the people climbed on the ark and rushed in, caught him, threw him out and stoned him. [374]

Despite the grim expectations, according to Andrea Pietramellara of Bologna the year 1524 turned out to be ordinary:

> *contrary to the expectation of many, since many were fearful of earthquake, excessive rain and other things hateful to mankind. Although we have not felt or seen such, yet there was a rumor that outside Italy and especially at Naples and in the mountains long rains had occurred, and there had been earthquakes, also rivers had submerged houses and villas not without great calamity to mortals.* [375]

A planetary conjunction took place indeed on the 23rd of February, but without having any earthly effects. Nevertheless, the conjunctions that

followed throughout history gave rise to equally sick speculations. In January 1583 Richard Harvey, one of the brothers of the famous poet Gabriel Harvey, prophesied the end of the world for the 28th of April, on the occasion of a conjunction between Saturn and Jupiter. [376] Both before and after the prophecy failed Richard Harvey was criticized by personalities of the time and mocked through ironic ballads and London plays. [377] Harvey's case caught the attention of William Shakespeare as well, who used the astrological scandals as a source of inspiration. [378]

Convinced that the world was on the brink of collapse, Pierre Turrel attempted to find out the time of the end by studying the movements of the eighth sphere, the pattern of the conjunctions Saturn-Jupiter and the completion of ten revolutions of Saturn at every 300 years. The calculations gave him four possible dates for the end of the world, extended over a period of 277 years: 1537, 1544, 1801 or 1814. [379] The Antichrist was to come under the Water Triplicity, but the world was going to end under the Fire Triplicity:

> *It is improbable for someone to be able to turn that divine power, or to resist it, and rather it seems that, if it is naturally approached, he should expect at the coming of the Antichrist, brought here by the Water Triplicity, and naturally by the fire flood through the Fire Triplicity: and this seems to be recognized and supported even by the cardinal of Aliaco [Pierre d'Ailly] ... It seems to me necessary to accept the image of the complete ruination of the world, when the resources of nature will be depleted and consumed ... It is improbable, neither through celestial influences nor through God's powers, that the world to be renewed again, but rather, it will be terminated, and destroyed.* [380]

In accordance to the model of d'Ailly, Turrel attempted to tie his times with a greater cosmic history. But the Catholic influences can be noticed in the satisfaction with which he predicted bad news for the Germans, associated by Turrel with Mars and the malignant sign of the Scorpio. In fact, Turrel's predictions were mainly a form of protest against the Reformation; the end of the world was a subsidiary issue. The fact that false prophets arose in his days and continued to gain power (reference to the Reformists) was assigned to the influence of the Water Triplicity (Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces) and the close

conjunction between Saturn and Jupiter in Scorpio in 1544. In order to add a sense of spiritual siege, he predicted victories to the Ottomans; the latter were identified with the Ishmaelite successors from the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius whose fate were to be defeated by a final Roman emperor. Furthermore, because Muhammad was born under the sign of a malefic planetary conjunction, the Antichrist was expected to be born at the time of an identical astrological event. And, given the fact that such a conjunction took place in 1504, the Antichrist had to rise around 1533, when he was 30 years old. [381]

Astronomical phenomena such as the rotation of the eighth sphere and the planetary conjunctions require thorough calculations and trained eyes. Instead, solar and lunar eclipses are visible to everyone, as an extraordinary divine spectacle through which God reminds mortals that their fate is in his hands. The deprivation of light and the spectacular installation of darkness in the natural middle of the day represented a symbolic message through which the earthly order of things heads toward a dramatic point. The medieval Christians put great emphasis on the relationship between eclipses, especially solar ones, and the coming of the Antichrist. According to the gospels, when Jesus Christ was born the night sky was pierced by a powerful light, currently called the “Star of Bethlehem.” This celestial event can easily be interpreted as a symbol for the light that came into the spiritual darkness, or Jesus who came to free us from sin and remake the relation between God and man. On the contrary, because the Antichrist would pretend that he is God and he would mimic the earthly work of Jesus, his coming would also have to be marked by an equally spectacular event, but with an opposite meaning. So, the birth of the Antichrist might be marked by a solar eclipse, a symbol of the spiritual darkness that would engulf the world. [382]

The Dominican Sebastian Constantinus of Taormina, when he prognosticated the flood of the year 1524, spoke about a solar eclipse with the center of darkness in Rome which was going to bring unimaginable disasters. By placing the center of darkness in Rome, Constantinus in fact made a subtle parallel between the event of Christ’s birth and the appearance of the Antichrist. While the star indicated the Savior’s appearance in Bethlehem, the eclipse of 1524 marked the place of the appearance of the Son of Perdition, which was Rome as the host of the Papacy.

Pierre Turrel explored a number of eclipses that were about to take place between 1485 and 1539, while the German doctor Ioannes Copp rejected the idea of a universal flood, but he prognosticated that the eclipse of 1524 would bring imbalances in nature, terrible sufferings, war and bloodshed so dreadful as it had not been seen in the last 1,000 years. [383]

After he witnessed the solar eclipse of January 15, 1572, Benedictus Aretius of Bern came to believe that the spectacular phenomenon had a much greater meaning than what it had been seen with the naked eye. Accordingly, he focused on the year of the eclipse, 1572, and it did not take him too long to find a magical combination: he took the well-known prophetic number 1,260 (years) and added 312, the year in which Constantine the Great sanctioned the Christian religion within the Roman Empire. So, according to Aretius, the eclipse of 1572 signaled the beginning of the end. [384]

Solar eclipses fascinated Helisaeus Röslin of Alsace as well, one of the first European astrologers who discussed the issue of heliocentrism. Röslin became concerned with the end of the world after the appearance of a supernova in 1572, whose appearance reminded of the Star of Bethlehem. After years of work and astrological calculations, in 1578 he concluded that the world would end in flames on August 12, 1654, on the occasion of a solar eclipse (which actually took place on the 11th of August). [385]

Another famous astrological prophecy was that of the German Regiomontanus for the year 1588. His work *Ephemerides astronomicae ab anno 1494 ad annum 1506* is a thorough study of eclipses, both solar and lunar, and covers complicated astronomical, astrological and mathematical calculations, together with details about historical eclipses. The work captivated Philip Melanchthon, Luther’s close friend, while Christopher Columbus used it in Jamaica to successfully predict a lunar eclipse on February 29, 1504, and to convince the natives to offer him food. [386] Regiomontanus concluded that a solar eclipse in the month of February and two lunar eclipses, in March and August, would occur in 1588. Furthermore, near the first lunar eclipse the planets Saturn, Jupiter and Mars would be in a threatening conjunction right in the astrological house of the Moon. This agglomeration of unusual astrological events in a single year signaled something very important, expressed by Regiomontanus in the following

verses:

A thousand years after the virgin birth

And after five hundred more allowed the globe,

The wonderful eighty-eight year begins and

Brings with it woe enough. If, this year,

Total catastrophe does not befall, if land

And sea do not collapse in total ruin, yet

Will the whole world suffer upheavals,

Empires will dwindle and from everywhere will

Be great lamentation. *[387]*

Although the text contains a high dose of pessimism, Regiomontanus did not expressly stated that the end would come in the second half of the 16th century; he only left the impression that something really important was going to happen on the world's stage.

In *Prognosticon* (1559) Cyprian von Leowitz, the personal astrologer of Emperor Maximilian II, tried to improve the astrology of Regiomontanus with the help of biblical chronology. *Prognosticon* is a mixed encyclopedia of history, astrology and statistics. It carefully details and correlates the important astrological and historical events over a period of 1,700 years, beginning with the Roman monarchy (the fourth monarchy from Daniel 2) and ending in the 16th century. The descriptions and the correlations between the earthly events and the astrological ones filled three quarters of *Prognosticon* ; but this massive string served only as a foundation for the prognostication that followed, materialized in a lunar/solar calendar for the following years until 1606. The prognostication started with a "terrifying eclipse of the Sun" observed in Cancer on June 20, 1563. Together with the planetary configuration, the eclipse heralded a series of frightful events such as devastating storms, the overthrow of many leaders and a great war that

would divide the Holy Roman Empire. According to Leowitz, the eclipses in Cancer precede many of the biggest troubles in history. In May 1584 Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were going to be in conjunction under the fire sign of Aries, temporarily accompanied by Mercury, Venus and the Sun. This celestial phenomenon apparently occurs once every 800 years. Besides these, there was also an eclipse of the Sun in Taurus, the occurrence of a comet, and other additional celestial signs. Celestial signs of this magnitude happened little before the birth of Christ as well, as they existed at the time of Charlemagne. But the world did not end at the time of Charlemagne, said Leowitz, because the world was not even 5,000 years old. Leowitz used therefore the millennial week pattern and, to add a plus of certitude to the prophecy of the year 1584, he ignored the creationist calculations of the early theologians and placed the year of the Creation around 4,500 before Christ. [388]

5.2.2. The eternal and controversial Nostradamus

At the time of the Reformation, European society was confused, violent, chaotic, filthy and desperate for answers. Celebrities and idiots alike pretended to be able to unravel God's plans by exploring different aspects of reality. In addition to personalities such as d'Ailly, De Bruges or Turrel, the French territories were sprinkled with a multitude of petty astrologers who combined the reading of the stars with visions, magic, alchemy and mathematics. But, surprisingly, of all these mystics, the best-known today is not a personality of the time, but a certain Michel de Nostredame, better known after his Latinized name "Nostradamus."

Even though he is often brought into question and he is the subject of hundreds of studies, little is known about the life of Nostradamus. Of Jewish origins, Nostradamus was born in 1503 in Southern France in a large family. Following the trend of the time, Nostradamus was a polymath: he learned several languages, studied history, mathematics, human nature, sought to predict the future and to understand the Bible, traveled frequently and managed to obtain a doctorate in medicine, although he unsuccessfully tried to cure the plague. [389] In 1547 he married the wealthy widow Anne Ponsard, who gave him six children. The new financial status introduced Nostradamus to high social circles and allowed him to give up medicine and turn to the study of mysticism. His first publication was an almanac for the year 1550 in

natural astrology, on the cover of which his Latinized name appeared for the first time. Then he began to publish almanacs in series, two or three every year, with meteorological previsions and medical and agricultural advice. These were composed of one quatrain for every year, a quatrain for every month and one for every day. Overall, from 1550 until his death in 1566, Nostradamus wrote 11 almanacs. [390]

After he got bored with almanacs and horoscopes, he began to work on his book of over 1,000 quatrains – the undated prophecies that made him famous. It was a transition from natural astrology (whose object of study was the relation between the movements of celestial bodies and weather) toward judicial astrology (whose object of study was the relation between social actions and celestial phenomena), a natural step for any astrologer who aimed to evolve. Apparently, in order to avoid the religious censorship, Nostradamus hid the true meaning of his message by using a "Virgilianised" syntax (after the Roman poet Publius Vergilius Maro); the Nostradamic quatrains contain word games, a mixture of other languages, symbols, metaphors and names within which letters are changed or added. Nostradamus mixed the meaning and the order of the quatrains, so that mankind could not use them until it would discover sophisticated methods of decoding. Moreover, the alchemical tradition imposed the mandatory encryption of the esoteric knowledge on the ground that in this way only those who were supposed to would understand it.

On the other hand, the vague style might have been deliberately adopted in order to let the writings be open to interpretations and to hide the real ineptitude that sat behind them. Neither prophecy nor astrology attracted severe punishments from the ecclesiastical or secular authorities, but only magic. His short incarceration at Marignane at the end of 1561 was due to the fact that he had published an almanac without the prior permission of a bishop according to the royal decree. But the relation of Nostradamus with the church was almost always good, as it was also his relation with the ruling class for which he made horoscopes. [391]

All the quatrains were compiled and published in the work entitled *Les prophéties* , his major collection of long-term prophecies. The first edition of *Les prophéties* was published in 1555. The second, which contained 289

more verses, was printed in 1557. The third edition, with 300 new quatrains, was printed in 1558, but it is assumed that a part of them have been lost. This last version contains a single unrhymed quatrain and 941 rhymed, grouped in nine sets of 100 and a set of 42 – sets named “centuries.” But, due to the printing practices of the time (which also included printing after dictation), none of the editions are identical. [392] Hence, there is no guarantee that the writing and punctuation of the later editions totally belong to Nostradamus. Until the end of the 20th century around 200 editions of the work came to the surface, together with a couple thousand commentaries.

Although in the preface to his main work – written under the form of a letter addressed to his son César – he assigns the merit of his work to the all-powerful God, Nostradamus does not fit the traditional image of the biblical prophet. On the contrary, he was a classic medieval diviner, who worked to achieve and to perfect his prophetic talent. The prophecies are believed to have been written in a state of trance similar to self-imposed hypnosis. In order to enter this state, he used objects considered to have magical properties, such as the pendulum, and he concentrated on fire or water. He transformed his attic into a small workshop, where during trances he sat at the table, in front of a mirror, with his hand on the knees, in a cool atmosphere, lit only by a few candles. In front of him a bowl with various oils and hot water was placed. It is speculated that before meditations he consumed nutmeg, a mild hallucinogenic plant that stimulates imagination, but is lethal in large quantities. Sometimes, sitting on the tripod, he watched the night sky while the secrets of the future were dictated to him by an entity called the “inner light,” the “voice” or the “angelic spirit.” According to legend, Nostradamus once summoned the angel Anael and asked him to show him in a magical mirror the fate of the queen’s children. [393]

It cannot be said which of these aspects are real, mere legends or fabrications meant to discredit him. The only and few descriptions of this process are included in his Latin correspondence. In his letter to King Henry II of France Nostradamus speaks about emptying the soul, the mind and the heart of all cares through calm and tranquility. [394] However, what is known for sure is that in the 16th century the usage of divination was the norm, not the exception.

Even if Nostradamus was special and he did not use rituals to discover the future, there are strong indications that his writings are plagiarisms. Much of his prophetic work paraphrases ancient apocalyptic and historical texts, all projected in the future with the help of comparative horoscopy. This explains the mentioning in the quatrains of historical personalities such as Romulus, Hadrian, Sulla or Nero, descriptions about decaying empires, dictators who are born or enslaved populations. A portion of his astrological references are taken almost *ad litteram* from the book of the doctor Richard Roussat *Livre de l'estat et mutation des temps* (1549). In his letter to his son César and in the preface of *Les prophéties* Nostradamus shows that his prophecies cover the time until the year 3797. Roussat, in his work, indicates, among other variants, [395] a possible end in the year 2242. If 2242 is subtracted from 3797, the result is 1555, the year of the first edition of *Les prophéties* . [396]

Another source of information was *De honesta disciplina* (1504) of Petrus Crinitus. [397] Crinitus in turn had taken fragments from *De daemonibus* of the Byzantine monk Michael Psellus and from *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* of Iamblichus, a 4th-century Assyrian Neoplatonist who speaks about the Chaldean and Assyrian magic. [398]

The situation is the same in the case of *Mirabilis liber* (1522), a popular anonymous compilation of prophecies emanated by different Christian personalities such as Pseudo-Methodius, the Tiburtine Sibyl, Joachim of Fiore or Girolamo Savonarola. The preface of *Les prophéties* contains 24 biblical quotations, of which only two had not been previously used by Savonarola. [399]

The plagiarism is much more noticeable in the letter to Henry II, in which Nostradamus used major eschatological themes of that time: the decadence of the church, the rise of the Antichrist, the Muslim attacks, the collapse of European civilization or different epic confrontations between nations. [400] The modern criteria regarding copyright did not exist in the 16th century; the authors from the past often copied and paraphrased passages without acknowledgment. Nostradamus might have used bibliomancy in the fabrication of the prophecies as well, a technique that involves the random selection of a book from a shelf, its opening at a random page and copying the ideas. [401]

Quatrain I.35 from *Les prophéties* is considered to be the best proof of the prophetic genius of the French mystic: [402]

The young lion, shall overcome the older

On the field of battle, by singular duel;

Through armor of gold, his eye will be pierced,

Two wounds in one, then to die a cruel death. *[403]*

On July 1, 1559, Henry II took part in a jousting against his friend Gabriel, Count of Montgomery. The lance of Montgomery accidentally pierced the royal helmet and penetrated an eye of the king. A splinter from the broken weapon caused Henry a second wound, which made him endure excruciating pains for ten days and ultimately brought his death. After the king passed away, Montgomery remained the sovereign of France, apparently as Nostradamus prophesied.

The reality is, however, very different. Quatrain I.35 was printed for the first time in 1614, 55 years after the event. It is not known if Henry wore a golden helmet. The interpretation of the young lion and the older one is vague; neither of them wore these types of emblems during the jousting or in everyday life. Besides, the weapon of Montgomery caused Henry a wound to his face, close to the eye, and not directly into the eye. And last but not least, the jousting is not a battlefield, while the clenching between the participants is not a fight in the real sense of the word. [404] It is interesting that the Italian astrologer Luca Gaurico, a contemporary of Nostradamus, was also credited with prophesying the death of Henry. But later analyses refuted Gaurico and subsequently condemned him to anonymity. [405]

Ever since the first edition of *Les prophéties* , the supporters of Nostradamus have credited him with prophesying almost every major thing that already happened: [406] the French Revolution, the ascension of Napoleon Bonaparte, [407] the world wars, the dictatorship of Hitler, [408] the development of the atomic energy, the start of the space age or the invention of the Internet. Yet, no major event was anticipated by using the Nostradamic prophecies; on the contrary, all the connections between his prophecies and historical events

have been made only after the fulfillment of the latter. [409]

A wide range of ideas and theories are expressed in the contemporary literature and virtual environment. At one end of the spectrum are the academics, who state that the prophecies of Nostradamus are backdated forgeries written by later hands for political purposes. At the other end is an industry formed of authors, books and domains that defend the truthfulness of the prophecies. Up to the moment hundreds, if not thousands, of analyses of the Nostradamic centuries have been made. Yet, there are no two identical interpretations; every single scholar has a unique opinion on what Nostradamus actually prophesied, whether it is about the past or the future.

In 1983 the prophet's private correspondence, [410] the original editions from 1555 and 1557 of *Les prophéties* and a large quantity of archived material were published in France. All these documents proved that most of what had been said about Nostradamus is groundless. The prophetic image of Nostradamus is largely based on unauthorized sources, on rumors reported as facts, the misinterpretation of 16th-century French texts, or mere inventions. Even more, the English translations were often poor, they neglected Old French, were tendentious and, worse, sometimes they were manipulated to fit the events they were believed to be referring to. [411]

In the 20th century Nostradamus became the world icon of the prophetic commercialism. His prophecies made a lot of stir in the years 1999, 2000 and 2001, especially because the year 1999 is expressly mentioned in quatrain X.72:

The year 1999 seven months

From the sky will come the great king of terror. [?]

To resuscitate the great king of the Mongols.

Before and after Mars reigns by good luck.

Before the coming of the year 2000 the above verses were said to announce the rise of the Antichrist ("the great king of terror") or the year when a great catastrophe would happen, such as the Third World War. Jesus Christ could

also be the great king of terror, returned to judge the world. Regardless of how absurd the theories and interpretations were, the most important thing was the money brought by the French mystic into the pockets of exegetes.

After the quiet passing of the years 1999 and 2000, the attacks of September 11, 2001, set in motion a new round of examinations of *Les prophéties* in order to be determined if the prophet foresaw this event. Relevant virtual domains were flooded with questions, while speculators such as David Montaigne launched bombastic books about imminent disasters. [412] The most promising quatrains were VI.97, I.87 and X.72. Quatrain VI.97 reads as follows:

At forty-five degrees the sky will burn,

Fire to approach the great new city:

In an instant a great scattered flame will leap up,

When one will want to demand proof of the Normans.

In turn, quatrain I.87 says:

Earthshaking fire from the center of the earth

will cause tremors around the New City.

Two great rocks will war for a long time,

then Arethusa will redden a new river.

The problem of the Nostradamic prophecies is their translation from the original French, which reverberate on the way of interpretation. “Forty-five degrees” was said to be the latitude of New York, which is incorrect; this is 40 degrees and 47 minutes. The “two rocks” seems to refer to the Twin Towers, but in the original French the word *tour* at masculine has nothing to do with towers; it is part of a phrase in which it has the meaning of “around.” [413] At first sight, the “New City” is New York. However, this phrase rather refers to the city of Naples, which literally means the “New City” (Romanized Greek: *Neapolis* , *nea polis* – “new city”). And the attempts to

match the “Normans” from the fourth line in the prophetic picture are mere figments. While it is true that the New York State, which has the same name as the metropolis of New York, is crossed by the latitude of 45 degrees, it cannot be, for sure, described as a new city, and therefore it has nothing to do with the Nostradamic lines. Another attempt associated the 45 degrees with the angle at which one of the hijacked planes hit the World Trade Center – a downright irrelevant and absurd aspect. [414]

The two quatrains were most likely inspired by *Annales Cassini* , the annals for the years 1000-1212 of the Benedictine abbey Monte Cassino. These report that in 1139 both the Vesuvius volcano violently erupted and the Normans conquered the city of Naples. Likewise, *Arethusa* was said to be an anagram for “USA” (the United States of America), but in the original sense it refers to a nymph of springs and rivers; a well-known spring of Arethusa is located in the Sicilian port of Syracuse. [415]

Quatrain X.72 is even less convincing. The only plausible correlation is “the great king of terror” that comes from the sky, an allusion to the state of fear and general terror generated by Osama bin Laden through the attacks. In addition, it was also claimed that 1999 is, through the inversion of the position of the numbers, a symbol for 9111 (which in the American style of dating might be written as 9-11-1). But in the original French the date is named through words, not numbers. Similarly, the “seven months” have been seen as a reference to the month of September in the Julian calendar or in the astrological calendar (which starts with March), or because September literally means the “seventh month,” as it was named by the Romans (Latin: *septem*). [416] The Julian calendar was indeed the calendar used during the time of Nostradamus, but in his almanacs he always used calendars that began on the 1st of January with the seventh month in July.

Angolmois was believed to be an anagram for *Mongolois* , or the Mongols. [417] The Mongols and the “king of terror” seem to be a reference to the tyrannical Genghis Khan or to someone similar to him. A Mongol empire in the 21st century is an absurdity, but, through the most diverse, fantastic and permissive interpretations, the Mongols from the Nostradamic prophecy came to be identified with Muslims or even with the Chinese people. [418] In reality, quatrain X.72 applies to an event from the author’s time. The word

Angolmois designates the French region of Angoumois, in whose capital (Angoulême) Francis I was duke. “The great king of the Mongols” (French: *Le grand Roy d’Angolmois*) is, therefore, Francis I of France, the contemporary of Nostradamus. Also, the translation or the insertion of the expression “of terror” in the second line of the quatrain is doubtful. The original French text uses the word *deffraieur* , which can have as root the verb *défraye* (which means “to defray”) or the verb *défraie* (which means “to pay” or “to spend”). However, it is tempting to transform or to present *deffraieur* as a variation of *d’effraieur* (which really means “of terror”). [419] If the prophecies of Nostradamus were constructed through the technique of projecting past events into the future, then quatrain X.72 describes the miraculous healing of Francis I of France in 1525, while he was the prisoner of the German emperor Charles V. [420]

Ascribing texts to personalities is practiced even today, especially as hoaxes. Shortly after September 11, 2001, the following text circulated on the Internet, alongside other more elaborate versions (some of them signed “Nostradamus 1654,” when he would have been 150 years old!):

In the City of God there will be a great thunder,

Two brothers torn apart by Chaos,

While the fortress endures,

The great leader will succumb,

The third big war will begin when the big city is burning. *[421]*

The first four lines were indeed written before the attacks of September 11, 2001, but not by Nostradamus, but by the Canadian student Neil Marshall as part of a research project in 1997. The research paper included this poem as an eloquent example about how the validity of prophecies is usually exaggerated. For example, constructions such as “city of God” (New York has never held this title), “great thunder” (can be applied to a multitude of disasters), “two brothers” (many things come in pair) and “the great leader will succumb” are so ambiguous that they have no special meaning. The fifth line was added by a virtual user who ignored that *Les prophéties* is composed

in rhymes of four decasyllabic lines (quatrains). Moreover, Nostradamus never referred to a "third big war." [422]

An even more obvious cyber-hoax appeared after George W. Bush won the presidential elections in the United States in the year 2000:

Come the millennium, month 12

In the home of greatest power

The village idiot will come forth

To be acclaimed the leader. [423]

As in the case of other hoaxes, only the English version existed. [424]

Another semi-deception that circulated on the Internet was that of the name "Mabus" from quatrain II.62:

Mabus then will soon die, there will come

Of people and beasts a horrible rout:

Then suddenly one will see vengeance,

Hundred, hand, thirst, hunger when the comet will run.

This was believed to be a prophecy about a series of three antichrists; the first two nominees were Napoleon and Hitler. [425] Nevertheless, the association of the name "Mabus" with the incarnation of the Antichrist is suggested nowhere in the main work. But the controversy of Mabus reveals a very important aspect regarding the prophecies of all time: their interpretations change according to demands and expectations. After the beginning of the Gulf War, Mabus was identified with Saddam Hussein (Mabus written backwards is "Subam," which resembles Saddam). In 2001 Saddam was replaced with Osama bin Laden and, again, the letters from "Mabus" were rearranged to form "Usam B" (resembling Osama bin Laden). Saddam was executed in 2007 and Osama bin Laden in 2011. After these events, "Mabus" was associated even with (Barack) "Obama." [426]

In fact, quatrain II.62 barely states that a man with a similar name will die. It most likely speaks about the Flemish painter Jan Gossaert de Mabuse, contemporary of Nostradamus, [427] or it may refer to a marquis of Ampus. [428] In any case, the quatrain says nothing about what Mabus would do or how he would look like.

Nostradamus, at least in the eyes of his supporters, prophesied even about the end of the world. According to some opinions, the French oracle spoke in his almanacs about an end of the world in the years 1576 or 1568. [429] Close to the year 2012 connections were made between his prophecies and the pseudo-prophecy of the Maya calendar. [430] By correlating the Nostradamic prophecies with other prophecies of the 20th century, Peter Lemesurier portrayed an end of the world that takes place on stages starting with the year 2500 and ends in the year 4500. [431] While Nostradamus expressly mentions in the letter to his son César that his prophecies cover the time until the year 3793, [432] Mario Reading speculated an end either at the beginning of the 22nd century or in the year 7074. [433] Interpretations can be countless. But it is hard to ignore the fact that the Nostradamic exegeses copy each other with barbarism and obsessively suggest the same set of events: the Third World War, climate failure, alien contact, the rise of the Antichrist, Parousia or the end of the world.

Despite what is shouted in the media, the “amazing prophecies” of Nostradamus made with “mathematical precision” are not amazing at all and they do not have the slightest precision. They are totally chaotic and this thing is reflected in absolutely all the failed forecasts based on his quatrains. They deliberately contain vague and general terms in order to stimulate selective thinking: there are no rules of interpretation, the texts can be suited to any major event, the prophetic failures are omitted or ignored, and the seeming successes are overrated. The message of Nostradamus in the letter to his son César, in which he states that the quatrains were written in a nebulous form rather than clear prophetic, can easily be seen as a “blank check”: they can mean almost anything they are supposed to mean. [434]

The prophetic reputation of Nostradamus is a product of the chameleonic exegetes eager to gain, while the evidence leads to the idea that the prophecies were constructed also through the method of postdiction

(retroactive clairvoyance). Postdiction is a prophecy so ambiguous that it can be easily associated with subsequent random events, or it is a precise statement about an event which the prophet falsely claims that he knew before it happened. [435] In the case of Nostradamus the following aspects are easily noticeable: the ambiguous statements, the open ending, the wide range of events he covers, the impossibility to identify the events until their consummation, the recycling of the prophecies and their usage for multiple events, [436] and last but not least the mania of the exegetes to launch allegorical superficial explanations in order to transform failures into successes.

In conclusion, due to the lack of information, Nostradamus might have been exceptional compared to 16th-century mass of seers. Likewise, the divinatory practices might be mere legends. But the quality of his prophecies cannot be contested. The ratio between the total volume of the Nostradamic prophecies [437] and the volume of prophecies said to come true is weaker than pure chance. Although in the preface of his main work Nostradamus states that the secret of deciphering the prophecies is closed in his heart, the reality of 500 years of failed exegesis indicates the fact that we stand in front of an out-of-control prophetic joke. Nostradamus gained worldwide notoriety through an accident of history, but in the end he was, like his contemporaries, only a product of the times he lived in. Just the fact that the original French prophecies are organized in rhymed quatrains proves that they were not meant to communicate a certain message, but to entertain a bored society. Unfortunately, Nostradamus will continue to remain for a long time the main character of the prophetic universe due to the financial benefits it generates. As long as Nostradamus the prophet enjoys an exceptional image, constantly “cleaned” of the naiveties of the 16th century, mystics, mediums and exegetes are able to sell their scribble. And while prophetic personalities such as d’Ailly, De Bruges or Gaurico have been forgotten when the occult collapsed, the ambiguity of the Nostradamic prophecies was, is and will be an inexhaustible source of stimulating the imagination and profit.

5.3. THE NUMEROLOGICAL APOGEE

Numerology is a domain that relies on the existence of a mystical connection between numbers and material objects or beings. Numerology, numerological

divination and isopsephy were popular in the ancient teachings of Babylonia, Greek philosophy, Gnosticism and in the Hebrew system of Kabbalah. [438] The early Christians condemned the philosophical systems with exclusive numerical bases (such as Pythagoreanism and Gnosticism), but they did not reject numerology; the calculations regarding 666 and the age of the world show that it became an important branch of biblical exegesis. The difference between the Pythagorean approach and the Christian one was that the latter understood numbers as inseparable from the divine will. [439] Saint Ambrose, commenting on the days of the Creation and the Sabbath, remarks: “The number seven is good, but we do not explain it after the doctrine of Pythagoras and the other philosophers, but rather according to the manifestation and division of the grace of the Spirit; for the prophet Isaias has enumerated the principal gifts of the Holy Spirit as seven.” [440] Likewise, Augustine criticized Tyconius the Donatist because he had based his doctrine excessively on numerology: “if Tichonius had said that these mystical rules open out some of the hidden recesses of the law, instead of saying that they reveal all the mysteries of the law, he would have spoken truth.” [441] For Augustine, everything contains a numerical relation and only the limits of the human mind restrain the successful investigation of these relations. [442] Or Isidore of Seville saw numbers as the substrate of all things, the foundation on which God created the world: “Remove numbers from all things, and everything perishes.” [443]

During the Middle Ages eschatological research through numerology dwindled. The medieval numerology was sterile and largely based on the works of the early scholars. Nevertheless, it can be said that numerology found a sort of fertile soil in art and architecture. Magnificent religious constructions were built using biblical numbers, and, at a time when beauty was believed to be a mathematical law, Leonardo da Vinci tried to create the ideal human face in Mona Lisa by using the “golden section.” [444]

Numerology flourished once again on the occasion of the Protestant Reformation. New calculations, new theories and new procedures came to explain the mysteries of the Bible and the meaning of events. The main goal of the mystics was to discover God’s plans for the world, not numbers in themselves. But, ironically, some of them became famous not for their achievements in numerology, but due to the (involuntary) contribution they

brought to the development of mathematics. For Michael Stifel, one of Luther's friends and innovator in mathematical notation, [445] every number contains a "substance" that manifests itself and has correspondence in the real world, while the symbols that represent them are products of the human choices. Anyone is capable to investigate the biblical mysteries, no matter the language he uses, because numbers, or, more correctly, the values expressed by numbers, are the same regardless of place or time. Numbers are the letters of God and mathematics is his language. God constructed the entire nature through numbers and man can find his plans through numbers as well. And, given the fact that the Creator offered us such instruments to investigate the biblical prophecies, it is legitimate to assume that the same Creator wants us to discover them and to use them. The Book of Revelation contains a suggestive statement regarding the investigation of the number 666: "Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast" (Revelation 13:18). So, the deepest truths are sealed in the secret language of numbers.

Stifel used three numerological methods in his eschatological quest. The first method consisted in choosing a phrase and the extraction from that phrase of all the characters that have numerical value in the Roman system: I = 1, V = 5, X = 10, L = 50, C = 100, D = 500, M = 1,000. Accordingly, in the Latin text *Iesvs Nazarenvs Rex Ivdeorvm* ("Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews") the letters that can be used as numerals are I, V, V, I, X, V, D, V, M. All added give the sum 1,532 (MDXXXII).

Most of the sentences analyzed by the German mathematician had anti-papal significance. In the Latin expression *Leo Decimvs* (Leo X, d.1522; *decimvs* meaning "tenth") the letters corresponding to numbers are L, D, C, I, M, V. All added give the number 1656 (MDCLVI), which hardly seems interesting in itself. On the table however, 1656 is not very different from 666; all that is needed is to move a unit from thousandths to tenths. From the fact that there are ten letters in *Leo Decimvs* and "M" is the first letter of the final number, Stifel assumed that in order to find the real value of *Leo Decimvs* he had to interpret M as 10, not as 1,000. Through the new calculation the correspondent sum of *Leo Decimvs* is 666.

The second numerological method used by Stifel was based on the order of

the letters in the Classical Latin alphabet, formed of 23 letters: A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, D = 4, E = 5, F = 6, G = 7, H = 8, I = 9, K = 10, L = 11, M = 12, N = 13, O = 14, P = 15, Q = 16, R = 17, S = 18, T = 19, V = 20, X = 21, Y = 22, Z = 23. Stifel ignored the Greek and the Hebrew alphabets because he believed that the secrets of Revelation happen and apply only to the Latin Church (Catholicism and the Papacy), and not to the Greek Church (Orthodox churches) or the Jewish people. Also, at first the Latin alphabet did not contain the letter "U." Instead, the letter "V" in interconsonantic position was read as "U." For example, for the word *angelvs* ("angel") the calculation is made by adding the numerical value of the letters according to the above table: A + N + G + E + L + V + S = 75. But this method did not bring any remarkable result. [446]

While the first two methods had been outlined before Stifel, the German mathematician has the merit of improving them by creating the so-called sequence of triangular numbers. This method is linked to the sequence of the natural numbers and it can be calculated according to the formula: the triangular number *n* = the sum of the first natural numbers *n* . The following correspondences are obtained: A = 1, B = 3 (A+2), C = 6 (B+3), D = 10 (C+4), E = 15 (D+5), F = 21, G = 28, H = 36, I = 45, K = 55, L = 66, M = 78, N = 91, O = 105, P = 120, Q = 136, R = 153, S = 171, T = 190, V = 210, X = 231, Y = 253, Z = 276.

The results obtained from the sentences analyzed with the triangular method were further combined with important years from the history of Christendom and special biblical numbers. All the relations took the form of an equality that, if the original words were again substituted, apparently expressed important truths. For example, while Catholic canons say that man has free will (Latin: *libervm arbitrvm*) and consequently the power to accept or to refuse divine grace and salvation, the Protestants believed that salvation depends entirely on God. If the world as a group has an absolutely predetermined path, then human beings – as part of the group – must have an absolutely predetermined path as well. Hence, the concept of free will was seen as a blasphemous Catholic invention meant to encourage the believers to "willingly" donate their money to the church. Through the third method Stifel determined that *Johannes Octavvs* (John VIII) [447] has the same numerical value as *libervm arbitrvm* , that of 1,448. Furthermore, 1,260 = *Ira revelabitvr*

("Anger revealed") and *Cessatio Paptvs* ("End of the Popes") = 1,517. In the year 1517 the Reformation began.

It is not clear how Stifel came to believe that the end of the world would happen on October 19, 1533, at eight o'clock in the morning (the 18th of October according to other sources [448]). In Matthew 24:36 Jesus says that no one knows the moment of the return of the Son except God the Father. But, based on Daniel 12:9, Stifel considered that this incognizance applies only to the generation of the 1st century or the period when the prophecy was told. The same idea is found in Matthew 16:3, where Jesus says that a godly event is preceded by signs that herald it. At the closing of history mankind is the most able to exactly determine the moment of the end. So, the German mathematician "read" the signs of his time and he concluded that Judgment Day was imminent. [449]

In addition to Stifel, the German mathematician Johannes Dobricius also believed that numbers are divine secrets and evidence of the godly omnipresence; everything expresses a quantity, and all nature's relations and proportions were built by God through numbers. [450] In the middle of the century, when there was the frenzy of water and fire floods, the Catholic Guillame Postel found out that the Roman letters of the Latin term *DILVVIVM* ("flood") equal 1,567. Helisaeus Röslin discovered that the sum of the letters of the Latin term *IVDICIVM* ("judgment") is 1,613. [451] And Eustachius Poyssel argued that the Council of Nicaea perverted the original practices by introducing an arbitrary method of determining the date of Easter. Between the year of the change (323 according to Poyssel) and 1583, when the new calendar was published by the pope, there was a period of 1,260 years. The first change occurred under Emperor Constantine, the second under the German emperor Rudolphus II. The numerical letters of the two Latinized names, *ConstantInVs* and *rVDoLphVs* , if added, equal 666. This meant that the 1,260 years was the length of the Antichrist's reign. And, as the destruction of Jerusalem came 40 years after the first Christian Easter, it was likely that the end of the world would occur 40 years after the last change of the calendar, in 1623. [452]

The English John Napier excelled in mathematics, but *A plaine discovery of the whole Revelation of St. John* (1563) is rather a book of theology than of

numerology, within which Revelation suffers an ample interpretation. For Napier, the fulfillment of the prophecy is observable, provable and precise. Like a mathematical analysis, the work is formed of guiding sentences numbered like axioms, each followed by an explanation:

> *The First Proposition. In the propheticall dates of daies, weeks, moneths and years, euery common propheticall day is taken as a yeare.*
>
> ...
>
> *2. Proposition. The seven Trumpets of the 8. and 9. chapters, and the seven Vials of the 16. Chapter, are all one.*
>
> ...
>
> *3. Proposition. The star and locusts of the fifth trumpet, are not the greate Antichrist and his Cleargie, but the dominator of the turkes and his armie, who began their dominion, in anno Christi 1051.*
>
> ...
>
> *4. Proposition. The Kinges of the east, or four Angels, specified in the sixt trumpet, or sixt vial. Cap. 9 & 16.are the four nations, Mahometanes beyond and about Euphrates, who began their empire by Ottoman, in the year of Christ, 1296. or thereabout.* *[453]*

The years 1256 and 1051 were determined on the basis of a comparison between the prophecies described in Revelation and events from that time. Because 1,296 – 1,051 = 245, then:

> *5. Proposition. The space of the fifth trumpet or vial containeth 245 years, and so much also every one of the rest of the trumpets or vials doe containe.*
>
> ...
>
> *12. Proposition. The first of the seven thunders, and the seventh and last trumpet or vial, begin both at once in an.1541.*

...

14. Proposition. The day of Gods iudgement appears to fall betwixt the years of Christ, 1688. and 1700. [454]

The year 1541 was based on the propositions 3 and 5: the year 1051 plus the times of the trumpets and the fifth and sixth vial, so 1,051 plus twice 245. Similarly, the year 1700 emerged from determining "the time that the continual [burnt-offering] shall be taken away" (Daniel 12:11) with the year 365. The 1335 days from Daniel 12:12, according to proposition 1, were taken as 1,335 years, and 1,335 + 335 = 1,700. The year 1688 was obtained by taking the year 1541 (proposition 12) and the adding of three periods of time of thunderous angels of 49 years each. In this way, through the combined interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, Napier set the closing of history between 1688 and 1700: [455]

23. Proposition: The Whore, who in the revelation is stiled spirituall babylon, is not reallie Babylon, but the verie present citie of Rome.

...

24. Proposition: The great ten-horned beast, is the whole bodie of the Latine Empire, whereof the Antichrist is a part.

...

26. Proposition: The Pope is the only Antichrist, prophecied of, in particular.

...

29. Proposition: The name of the beast expressed by the number 666. (cap. 13) is the name λατεινοσ [lateinos] onely.

...

32. Proposition: Gog is the Pope, and Magog is the Turkes and Mahometanes. [456]

In the application of the isopsephy, or the assignation of numerical values to letters, Napier did not go over the possibilities offered by the Greek Ionic numeral system: all the 24 letters of the alphabet plus three usual symbols have a numerical value. In the 29th proposition 666 is extracted from the word *lateinos* , an argument taken from Irenaeus. Moreover, in the Greek version of the New Testament the number 666 is written as χξζ, where χ + ξ + ζ = 600 + 60 + 6. The symbol χ is a Greek cross; ξ is one and the same with the Latin "X," also a cross; and stigma ζ or στ is the symbol from the beginning of the Greek word σταυροζ ("cross"). Hence, the number 666 denotes the institution that abused the symbol of the cross, the Catholic Church. [457]

The German linguist Andreas Helwig took 15 titles in Hebrew, Greek and Latin and calculated their equivalent numbers until he found the number 666 in the expression *Vicarius Filii Dei* (the "Representative of the Son of God"). This appeared for the first time in the 8th century within the forged document *Donatio Constantini* : "as the Blessed Peter is seen to have been constituted vicar of the Son of God on the earth, so the Pontiffs." [458] In the 13th century the expression *Vicarius Filii Dei* reappeared in *Corpus Juris Canonici* of the Catholic Church, which paraphrased *Donatio Constantini* . [459] Then, in the 14th century, at the order of Pope John XXII, Agostino Trionfo wrote *Summa de potestate ecclesiastica* , in which he defended the ecclesiastical and secular power of the Papacy. Within it, Trionfo used more than 80 variants of the expression *vicarius dei* when referring to the Papacy. [460] Even nowadays different official documents from the Vatican contain strings of words such as "the vicar of the adored Son of God and Leader Who conferred the highest authority to the eternal and sacred Church." [461]

According to Helwig's analysis, VICarIVs fILII DeI = 5 + 1 + 100 + 1 + 5 + 1 + 50 + 1 + 1 + 500 + 1 = 666, where "U" is taken as "V." Helwig suggested that the alleged title is an extension of the historical title *Vicarius Christi* (the "Representative of Christ"), rather than an official title used by the popes. Nevertheless, his interpretation became popular at the time of the French Revolution, [462] when *Vicarius Filii Dei* was said to be an official title of the Papacy engraved on the mitre or the tiara of the popes.

Although it was denounced as a forgery since the time of Otto III, *Donatio*

Constantini was officially rejected by the Catholic Church only about the time Helwig published his work. Ever since, the Catholic Church has denied the existence of a title *Vicarius Filli Dei* for the popes and the issue has been categorized as an "anti-Catholic myth." Nevertheless, the title, its versions [463] and their numerical calculation have continued to be a controversial topic and to be revived whenever different groups aimed to emphasize their purity in contrast to the uncleanness of Catholicism.

The Protestant "awakening" fueled for a long time the idea that there is a number of elected people (naturally, Protestants) who have access to prophetic secrets. The French mathematician Blaise Pascal, an enthusiast of apocalyptic prophecies, affirmed that "the prophecies are to be unintelligible to the wicked ... but they are to be intelligible to those who are well informed." [464] The same idea guided the German Johannes Faulhaber of Ulm as well, whose numerological work represents the apogee of using the science of mathematics in eschatological research. For Faulhaber, numbers, as abstract concepts, represented the building blocks of the real world. Everything is ordered through numbers and nothing can exist outside them. Not even time could exist without numbers because time itself or the passing of time are in fact the changing of numbers.

Faulhaber considered that, from the infinity of numbers which emanate from God, he gave man through the Bible the knowledge of only a couple of numerological clues: 2,300, 1,290, 1,335, 666, 1,260, 1,600 and 1,000. Through these numbers, those with faith and wisdom could unravel the secrets of the Universe. Given the fact that great mathematicians and philosophers of the Antiquity knew nothing about these biblical numbers, the German mathematician believed that God intended to hide them until the end of days. [465] If God wished man to discover the prophetic secrets with the help of common sense, then these numbers should have been discovered much earlier. Instead, God kept these numbers secret until the First Coming of Christ. However, although Christians now know the numbers, their true meaning cannot be found without divine illumination. And the result of illumination stands beyond human comprehension. Human reason is by no means sufficient to investigate prophetic truths, so the action of the Holy Spirit is essential. Even if one is attracted to numerology by simple curiosity, without divine intervention his effort is in vain. Therefore, Faulhaber

conceived his works like a maze in which the readers have to work, have to be tested and have to discover for themselves the secrets he had already found. In this way the German mathematician wanted to be sure that only those touched by divine grace would understand his conclusions. [466]

Numerology continued to be used and appreciated until the 18th century, but it inevitably followed the same path as the other mystical domains: development, apogee and decline. After Faulhaber, subsequent mystics such as Johannes Cocceius, Campeius Vitringa or Johann Albrecht Bengel limited themselves mainly to analyzing and reciclying previous work. [467] In the 19th century, due to the development of science, numerology collapsed and reached the status of pseudoscience. Today, numerology, numerological divination and isopsephy are treated by the scientific community as pseudo-mathematics. The relation between mathematics and numerology is similar to the relation between astronomy and astrology, or between chemistry and alchemy. Astrology survived in modern times because it became a part of the entertainment industry. Numerology, on the other hand, remained an obscure domain, occasionally used in studies of eschatology, the occult or conspiracy theory.

5.4. THE CATHOLIC COUNTER-REFORMATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURISM

During the Reformation both sides used the same symbols, the same rhetoric and the same techniques to dismantle the opponent. For Protestants, Catholicism and the Papacy were the embodiment of the apocalyptic Babylon and the Antichrist, while Luther's initiative had the divine mission to invigorate the true faith before the Second Coming. On the other side of the barricade, for Catholics the Reformation was a machination of the devil meant to destabilize the institution of the church and to prepare the rise of the Antichrist. The French Pierre Turrel named the Lutherans as "German scorpionists" because the Lutheran heresy occurred under the baleful sign of the Scorpio. Similarly, in 1549 Richard Roussat advanced several possible dates for the end of the world and depicted the birth of John Calvin as a product of the baleful conjunction Saturn-Jupiter, as if Calvin was the forerunner of the Antichrist. [468] Or in 1543 Guillaume Postel severely criticized Protestantism and compared it with Islam. [469] But, no matter how

much the Catholics struggled to conserve the existing structure and order, the Catholic Church had to react to the Protestant Reformation and reform itself, or otherwise it risked becoming history. Therefore, in the light of these reasons, the Catholic Church started an institutional and doctrinal process of reorganization called the “Catholic Counter-Reformation.”

The Counter-Reformation was set in motion at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) at the initiative of Pope Paul III and it lasted until the end of the Thirty Years’ War in 1648. The Counter-Reformation was a very significant and comprehensive undertaking, composed of five major elements: doctrine, structural and ecclesiastical reconfiguration, religious orders, spiritual movements and political dimensions.

The Council of Trent suppressed all the attempts of conciliarism – the belief that the general councils of the church are God’s representatives on the earth, and not the pope. This meant that the medieval structure of the church was reaffirmed, while the papal primacy and the doctrine *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (“there is no salvation outside the church”) remained intrinsic parts of Catholicism. [470] Nevertheless, the organization of the institutions was tightened, the discipline was improved and naming bishops on political grounds was no longer tolerated. Seminars were established for the proper instruction of the priests in the spiritual life and the theological traditions of the church. New religious orders, focused on the devotional life and a personal relation with Christ, were instituted: the Capuchins, the Ursulines, the Theatines, the Discalced Carmelites, the Barnabites or the Jesuits. These strengthened the local parishes, improved popular piety, fought corruption and served as examples for the Catholic renewal. Of the new orders, the Jesuits (Latin: *Societas Iesu* – “Society of Jesus”) were the most efficient. The order was founded in 1534 by the Spanish Ignatius de Loyola after he had experienced visions of the Virgin Mary. His order was organized according to the military model: careful selection, rigorous training and iron discipline. The Jesuits assured themselves that the worldly aspects of the Renaissance would not to be part of their world. They also participated in the expansion of the church in the Americas and Asia, their missionary efforts surpassing the most aggressive Protestants. [471]

Besides the institutional reform, the Catholic Counter-Reformation was

directed against the occult as well. Luther, Zwingli or Calvin denounced the astrological practices, but they represented the exception. Likewise, within Catholicism the condemnation remained at the level of words. Prelates of all ranks preferred to ignore the problem rather than to confront it, especially because many of them sympathized with astrology. Things changed with the installation of Sixtus V in 1585 and the manifestation of his fantastic ambitions: the annihilation of the Turks, the conquering of Egypt or the transportation of the Holy Sepulcher to Italy. Besides a distorted sense of reality, Sixtus believed with fanaticism that the church must be purified of all external intrusions, including divinatory practices. [472] Accordingly, the mix between divination and theology was no longer tolerated, while manuscripts suspected of heresy were confiscated and burned or deposited in a safe place.

The Counter-Reformation played an important role in the collapse of mysticism and development of science. In 1543 in *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* Nicolaus Copernicus boldly stated that in the center of the Universe is the Sun (heliocentrism), and not Earth (geocentrism). The work of Copernicus shattered the bases of astrology and signaled the start of the Scientific Revolution. It contained an unsigned preface of Osiander that defended the heliocentric system and argued that it was useful for computation even if its hypotheses were not true. The work has never been put under the sign of heresy; on the contrary, it was dedicated to Pope Paul III and it was made at the request of the Catholic prelates, as part of the efforts of the Counter-Reformation to create a more accurate calendar. And, while Catholicism somehow conditionally supported heliocentrism, Protestants categorized it as blasphemy. [473] Calvin denounced those who "pervert the order of nature" and say that Earth is moving, [474] while Abraham Calovius rhetorically asked "who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?" [475]

One of the major challenges of the Counter-Reformation was to find a viable argument against Protestant historicism. A new apocalyptic interpretation, meant to "cleanse" the negative-apocalyptic image of the Catholic Church, had to be found. This task was largely taken by the Jesuits, who sought guidance in the theories of the early theologians.

The futurism advanced by Francisco Ribera in *In Sacrum Beati Ioannis*

Apostoli, & Evangelistiae Apocalypsin Commentari (1590) received the most enthusiastic reception. [476] Inspired by the eschatological position of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Clement of Rome or Justin Martyr, Ribera argued that the prophecies have a physical, literal, global and future fulfillment. According to the Spanish theologian, the key to interpret Revelation sits in the verse 1:19: "Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter." Hence, Revelation must be divided into three sections: chapter 1 describes the past ("the things thou sawest"), chapters 2-3 describe the present at the moment of the writing of the book ("the things which are"), while the rest of the chapters, from 4 to 22, depict the future. The apocalyptic future is in turn divided into two sections: chapters 4-19, which refer to a future period of three and a half years – the great tribulation – right before the Second Coming, and chapters 20-22, which depict the future existence of humanity.

According to Ribera, within these undetermined and future three and a half years the Catholic Church would fall from the hands of the pope into apostasy. Then, said Ribera, the Jewish Antichrist, who would be a single individual and not an institution or a system, would rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem, would deny Jesus Christ, would be received as the Messiah by the Jews, would pretend that he is God, would kill the two witnesses of God and would conquer the world. The 1,260 days from Revelation 12:6, the 42 months from Revelation 11:2 and 13:5, or "a time, and times, and half a time" (three and a half times) [477] from Revelation 12:14 are not 1,260 years based on the principle day/year extracted from Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6, but a period of three and a half literal years. Due to the fact that Protestants insisted on a literal Millennium, the Catholics declared it a symbol for the time between Christ's resurrection and the rise of the Antichrist. [478] In conclusion, any exegesis incriminating the ecclesiastical hierarchy was refuted because no part from the Book of Revelation can be applied to the Middle Ages; it describes the future before Parousia, hence the name "futurism." [479]

A more "practical" eschatological vision was preterism, advanced by the Spanish Jesuit Luis del Alcázar. Originally advanced by Eusebius of Caesarea, preterism presented the prophecies of the New Testament as being already fulfilled in the 1st century of the Christian era. The Antichrist, the

great tribulation, the apostasy or the fall of Babylon were seen as symbols for Rome, the evolution of the Roman Empire, the Neronian persecution, the destruction of the Holy Temple by the Romans in 70 AD, the dissolution of the Jewish state and the victory of Christianity. After the prophetic failure of the year 1000 the image of Nero returning as the Antichrist had been gradually abandoned. Until the time of the Counter-Reformation most of the Catholic exegetes preferred to see a future Jewish Antichrist. Only a few had an undecided dualistic position. Ralph of Laon in the 12th century, Hugh of Saint Cher, Nicholas of Gorran and Alex "Minorita" of Bremen in the 13th century and Peter Auriol and Nicholas of Lyra in the 14th century stated that the great tribulation was either the reign of Nero in the past or it will be at the time of the Antichrist in the future. [480] Alcázar's theory clearly delimited preterism, stating that Revelation and the rest of the New Testament prophecies refer to the tumultuous period that marked the end of the Mosaic Covenant and the beginning of the eternal Covenant of the Church. Nero was the Antichrist and the Millennium from Revelation 20 is a symbol of Christendom, which began when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. [481]

Preterism was little accepted because it was advanced a couple of decades after a certain Catholic consensus had been established regarding futurism. In this way futurism became dominant within the Catholic precepts, while historicism continued to be promoted in Protestant circles until the 19th century.

5.5. THE TURKISH DOOM AND THE THREAT OF ISLAM

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 caused a deep feeling of insecurity and various reactions in the Christian world. God's plans for the Church seemed to be grim. In *De pace fidei* the German Nicolaus Cusanus appreciated that the end of the world would happen sometime between 1700 and 1734, probably through the destruction of Christianity by the Ottomans. [482] The Dominican Giovanni Nanni da Viterbo had a different opinion; in *Tractatus de futuris christianorum triumphis in turcos et saracenos* (1480) he debated the issue of identifying Muhammad with the Antichrist and concluded that Christians would reclaim the lost territories through their own efforts or through Christ's intervention. The Ottoman Empire was the seventh angel of

the Apocalypse and the pouring of the vial of wrath, while the Turkish military successes were a necessary divine punishment for Christian unfaithfulness. [483]

For Martin Luther the Ottoman Empire was the fulfillment of prophecy of the "white horse" from Revelation 6:1-2, Conquest. [484] The Ottomans, in his opinion, were nothing more than a blind multitude which was executing the directives of a false religion invented by "a devil, and a first-born child of Satan" (Muhammad). [485] Together with the Jews, the Papacy and heretics, Muslims were part of a wicked coalition assembled against the true Church. [486] In 1529 at the Marburg Colloquy, when Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent was besieging Vienna, Luther promoted only the defense, and under no circumstances the offense against the Turks. [487] In fact, he rejected the idea of a "holy war" or crusade, reasoning that all men are equal in front of God. Killing heretics is under no circumstance justified because Christ does not want the death of the sinner, but his repentance. [488]

Philip Melanchthon, inspired by the prophecies of the German monk Johann Hilten, saw the Ottomans as Gog and Magog and their offensive as the great tribulation. [489] In 1485, 23 years after the fall of Constantinople, Hilten wrote a commentary on the Book of Daniel in which he prophesied that in 1516 "a man against the monastery" would rise to reform the church, the Papacy would decline, in 1600 a tyrant would rule Europe, Germany would be subdued by the Turks and in 1651 the end of the world would come. [490]

A widespread prophecy at the time of the Reformation was that of Bartholomaeus Georgievicz, a Croatian fugitive from the hands of the Turks. More exactly, Georgievicz did not formulate a prophecy, but he reproduced an Islamic prophecy heard while he had been in captivity. In *Vaticinium infidelium lingua turica* he reproduced in Latin a prophecy in which the sultan was depicted taking control of the "Red Apple." [491] In fact, the prophecy brought by Georgievicz was initially called the "Red Apple Tree" and it was of Byzantine origin. The advancement of the Turks toward Constantinople gave rise to legends and prophecies about the inevitable siege and the saving divine intervention. The prophecy of the Red Apple Tree said that the Turks would enter the city, but when they would reach the Column of Constantine an angel would descend from the sky, he would give a magical

sword to an unknown Christian and he would urge the survivors to chase away the infidels. In this way the Byzantines would push back the Turks up to the border with Persia at the place of the Red Apple Tree. [492] Obviously, the events turned out quite differently, and Georgievicz picked the prophecy after the fall of Constantinople in a much altered version.

Christian scholars speculated that the Red Apple symbolizes Rome or Constantinople. The two were sister cities, the centers of medieval Christianity. This invisible connection made Pope Pius II describe the fall of Constantinople as "the loss of one of the two eyes of the church." [493] So, the fall of one city stirred the feeling that it was only a matter of time until the other would fall as well, and thus Christendom would be ruined. [494]

Other prophecies optimistically spoke about the revival of the Byzantine Empire. Same as the German legend of Frederick II – the "last Roman emperor" – who was sleeping in a cave in the mountains of Germany, the Byzantines had the legend of the emperor turned into marble. The death of Constantine XI Palaiologos was shrouded in mystery. This generated a legend which said that the emperor had been kidnapped by an angel, carried into a cave near the Golden Gate of the city and turned into marble. At the right time he would be turned back into human form and he would help Christians regain the control of the city. [495]

Muslims had their own apocalyptic prophecies regarding the clash of civilizations. As Western Christians tied the destiny of the Universe to the status of the Western Roman Empire in the first millennium, in the same way Muslims had prophecies about an end of the world conditioned by the fate of the Eastern Roman Empire. The *hadith* Sahih Muslim, written in the 9th century, speaks about the fall of Constantinople in the hands of Muslims, the victory over the infidels and the immediate appearance of Jesus, the Mahdi and the Antichrist:

> *The Last Hour would not come until the Romans would land at al-A'maq or in Dabiq. ... would be killed ani the third who would never be put to trial would win and they would be conquerors of Constantinople. ... Certainly, the time of prayer shall come and then Jesus (peace be upon him) son of Mary would descend and would lead them in prayer. ... I heard Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: The Last*

Hour would come (when) the Romans would form a majority amongst people (Sahih Muslim 6924-6925).

The work of Bartholomaeus Georgievicz was translated into English by Hugh Goughe and printed in London, thus becoming available to English readers. Inspired by the preface of Melanchthon, Goughe declared in a letter dedicated to Thomas Gressam (Gresham) that

to the great damage and utter decay almost of Christes' infillible religion, the great Turkes' power and empire hath spredde itselfe so farre that at this instant ar[e] subiecte to his cruell tyrannye above foure and thirtye moste famous nations whiche in times paste have bene christened, yea and within these fourescore years, as one Hiltenius by prophesyinge hathe foretolde us, he shall have dominion both in Italie and Germanie: ponderinge with myselfe this pittifull estate and lamentable ruyne of Christianitye, ... faithe of those circumcised infidelles, with the horrible rackinge, painefull tormenting, and unnaturall abusing of our faithefull brethrenm the innocent Christians most miserably oppresed with the heavye youke of their unmeasurable taxes, tributes, and continuall bondage. [496]

Goughe refers in his text to the success of the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, who was reigning at that time and who was rumored to be dying. The image and the attitude of Christians regarding the Ottomans were not very different in the 17th century compared to the period of First Crusade. Europe was full of stories and rumors about sultans who were very ill, dying or with terrible physical or mental defects – aspects associated by Christians with demonic possession or God's punishment. [497]

The defeat of the Turks at Malta (1565) and Lepanto (1571) brought some relief to Europeans and shattered the Ottoman apocalyptic paradigm. In 1596 in *Tractatus Theologastro nomistoricus* David Herlicius argued that the evidence from the holy texts, history and the heavens indicated the imminent collapse of the giant from the East and the end of the world. [498] The Islamic apocalyptic approach changed even further with the defeat of the Turks at the Battle of Vienna in 1683. From that point on, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of stagnation and then decline, which subsequently led to a decrease of prophecies on the subject.

As the exchange of information between Orient and Occident intensified, the image of Islam and its prophet were gradually purified of fantastic elements and presented in an increasingly realistic light. After the Reformation, Muhammad was depicted rather as a selfish cunning impostor than as an idol of Muslims. At the time of the Age of Enlightenment the depictions and interpretations of Islam and Muhammad were multicolored, oriented toward the social, historical, political and economic aspects to the detriment of matters of religion and spirituality. In the 18th century Voltaire bluntly stated that he wrote the play *Fanaticism, or Mahomet the Prophet* in order to expose the "founder of a false and barbarous sect." [499] For Charles-Louis Montesquieu Islam speaks only by the sword and "acts till upon men with that destructive spirit with which it was founded." [500] Edward Gibbon noticed that the good sense of Muhammad despised the pomp of royalty, and he named him "the apostle of God." [501] On the contrary, for David Hume Islam teaches treachery, inhumanity, cruelty, revenge, bigotry, and its values are utterly incompatible with civilized society. [502] In the 19th century Alexis de Tocqueville said that " there have been few religions in the world as deadly to men as that of Muhammad" and Islam is the main cause of the decadence of the Muslim world. [503] Thomas Carlyle described Muhammad as a deep, silent and great soul, [504] while Friedrich von Bodenstedt portrayed him as a prophet of murder. [505] Arthur Schopenhauer described the Quran as a wretched book, without one single idea of value and the saddest and poorest form of theism, which inspired bloody wars and extensive conquests. [506] Friedrich Hegel compared Muhammad with Robespierre because they both used terror to achieve their aims. [507] And in the 20th century Carl Jung compared Hitler with Muhammad and Nazism with Islam, [508] while Bertrand Russell said that both Islam and Bolshevism are "practical, social, unspiritual, concerned to win the empire of this world." [509]

All religions have the potential to incite violence. But some do more than others; we can clearly see this now, in the 21st century. Islam has a problem with its prime model, Muhammad. As long as Muhammad is considered morally immaculate and a real prophet of God, then everything he did was divinely justified and good. Which further means that every single Muslim is entitled to do the same things as Muhammad: kill, enslave, have child brides. On the contrary; if Muhammad was not immaculate and his actions were wrong, then he was not the prophet of God and Islam is a false religion. Only

time will tell if Muslims will manage to cherry-pick the good parts of their religion and prolong its existence.

6. THE ENGLISH EVANGELICAL REVIVAL

6.1. THE HENRICIAN REFORMATION AND THE RISE OF PURITANISM

The separation of the Church of England from Rome – started in 1529 and finished in 1536 – brought England alongside the general movement of Reformation. Nevertheless, the religious changes in the isle were much more restrained than in the German regions or the Netherlands. Between a radical anti-papal tradition expressed by John Wycliffe and the Lollards since 1415 [510] and the anti-Reformation promoted by Thomas More, the English theologians alternated, for centuries, between the Catholic tradition and reformatory principles.

In the German regions the Reformation occurred due to the need of ecclesiastical reorganization; in England, on the contrary, the Reformation was started due to the political interests of Henry VIII. His wife, Catherine of Aragon, gave birth to a single child, Mary. At the time England was in the shadow of a long dynastic conflict known as the "War of the Roses," and the king feared that the lack of a male heir might endanger the throne for his descendants. Henry asked Pope Clement VII to annul his marriage so that he could remarry and conceive a boy. But Clement categorically refused him; if he granted the annulment, then he would have tacitly admitted that his predecessor, Julius II, committed an error, and at the same time he would have confirmed the Lutheran accusation that the popes replaced God's will with their own judgment. Henry was an honest Catholic. But the pope's refusal made him realize that it was more convenient to take the religious power into his own hands and solve his problems alone. Accordingly, through the *Act of Supremacy* of 1534 he established the royalty as the supreme leader of the religious affairs and the Church of England became independent of Rome's authority. Between 1535 and 1540, through an ample campaign, the veneration of the saints and some pilgrimage places were removed, the huge properties of the church were passed into the hands of the

crown and nobility, while opponents such as Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher ended up executed or incarcerated. [511]

So, the English Reformation was at first a political affair rather than a theological dispute. Despite the implementation of the Henrician Reformation, England was far from embracing Protestantism. After a continuation of the Henrician ideas under Edward VI and a draconian Catholic restoration during Mary I, the prevailing consensus was put in place by the establishment of Anglicanism in 1559 by Elizabeth I. Anglicanism largely followed the lines established by Henry VIII and it represented a fragile, but viable compromise between extreme Calvinism and Catholicism. [512]

In the given context, some Protestants felt that the English Reformation was inconsistent because the Church of England continued to tolerate and practice Catholic doctrines. These Protestants came to be known as “Puritans” and their system of ideas as “Puritanism.” The Puritans militated for more “purity” in worship, doctrine and piety. The term “Puritan” has been often extended to designate any conservative Protestant. Initially, it was synonymous with “Cathar,” and it was used to associate certain extremist individuals or groups with the famous French Cathar sect. The Puritans did not use the term to designate themselves. Instead, in the 1560s the term “Puritan” was conceived as a form of abuse and mockery for those who found the Elizabethan solution inadequate. So, Puritanism has always designated a certain type of religious belief, not a sect.

The Puritans were mainly Calvinists (like many of their opponents), but they also took into account the radical views of Zwingli. During the reign of Elizabeth I Puritanism involved both social and political components, besides the religious ones. [513] The Puritan sermons and discourses had a revolutionary character, insisting on the decadent state of the world and the imminent return of Christ. Their reforms focused on simplicity and the elimination of any aspects considered unessential. The harmful social objects and customs, expression of luxury or lasciviousness, had to be eradicated. As long as society did not change in a radical way toward the good, the closeness to God was impossible. Therefore, they made huge efforts for the closing of bars and taverns, the interdiction of gambling, theaters, production and consumption of alcohol, the adoption of simple clothing, and even the

banning of Christmas, considered a popish invention and an opportunity for waste. [514] The Puritans also opposed the supremacy of the monarch in the church and argued that the only head of the Church in Heaven or on the earth is Christ. They promoted the separation between church and state and categorized the “divine right of the kings” as heresy. Other notable beliefs were the priesthood of all believers and keeping the Sabbath, although the Sabbath (identified with the day of Saturday) was believed to be changed by the Papacy to Sunday. [515]

6.2. HEBRAISM

6.2.1. The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel

Since the early days of Christianity the Jews have been blamed for being the allies of the devil. The Jews had been a sort of universal scapegoat: whenever there were times of panic or “divine” plagues, they were accused and killed. And yet, the Christian eschatological scenario requires a return of the Jews to the Holy Land so that the Antichrist can manifest himself among them (Hosea 1:11). But the materialization of this grandiose project raises special problems of logistics, sociology, demography and geography. Of the 12 tribes of Israel, as they are described in Genesis 35:21-26, ten seems to have been scattered and lost in the mists of history beginning with 720 BC, during the Assyrian domination; the biblical books of Chronicles and Kings offer the most details on this subject. But it cannot be said for certain how many and which tribes were scattered. Only the century-old tradition, aided by religious beliefs, supported the presence of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin at the moment of Christ’s birth (hence the name of “Judaism” for the religion of the Jews). This means that the other ten tribes of Israel, considered lost and scattered across the world, are those of Reuben, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Levi, Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher. And the Antichrist cannot reveal himself until there is a repatriation of the Jews to the Holy Land, especially of the tribe of Dan.

The scattering of ten tribes of Israel by the Assyrians is a historical fact. On the other hand, searching for these tribes turned into an adventure in itself, as the quest for the Holy Grail, King Arthur or Merlin the wizard. Attempts to discover the Ten Lost Tribes have been made since the 13th century both by

Christians and Jews. [516] And throughout time the descendants of Israel were seen almost everywhere: in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, or in the 16th century even in America.

The Old Testament shows that the Israelite people managed, against all odds, to survive and preserve its religious and cultural identity in the pagan sea of the Middle East by respecting rules dictated by Yahweh. Hence, the Puritans believed that by using the same rules and customs they would manage to survive in the corrupt sea of Catholicism and Anglicanism. This, together with the prospect of discovering the Ten Lost Tribes, generated a trend that manifested through interest for the Hebrew culture, the introduction of Hebrew customs in the social life, and support for the restoration of the Jews in their homeland. This is how "Hebraism" began.

The Puritans studied the Hebrew language and the original sources of the Bible. In order to signal their new status, they named their meeting places "temples," not "churches," or they began to baptize their children with Jewish names. The amount of religious names says a lot about the religiosity and the intellectual state of a mass of people. Muslims, for example, are obsessed with naming their children "Muhammad" or "Abdullah." The traditional Christianity has adopted biblical names mainly from the New Testament, linked to the New Covenant of the Church: "John," "Mary," "Paul" or "Peter." Instead, in order to avoid the Catholic corruption, the Puritans sought inspiration in the Old Testament and named their progenies "Benjamin," "Samuel," "Obadiah," "Isaiah" or "Isaac." This practice has been followed until today and it is present within Protestant and Neo-Protestant groups.

In the legal field the adherents of Hebraism presented the Mosaic laws as a model worth following. Between 1631 and 1655 John Selden published eight works about Israelite laws and customs, ranging from the punishment of criminals to the management of public goods. Selden depicted the alternative of the legislative and administrative model instituted by God through the Israelites, in contrast to the secular faulty government of English society. [517]

Another Hebraist manifestation was Sabbatarianism [518] – a practice started during the German Radical Reformation and it refers to the observance of the day of rest according to the Old Testament. The Sabbath (Romanized Hebrew: *Shabot*) literally means "to rest." The early Christians kept the day

of rest according to the Jewish Sabbath, on Saturday. But the Council of Laodicea in 364 established Sunday (The Day of the Lord) as the day of rest.

Similarly, Presbyterianism was not a group or an organization, but it designates an administrative procedure meant to repair the organizational distortion perpetrated by the Papacy. The adherents of Presbyterianism (Romanized Greek: *presbýteros* – "superior," "elder") believed that the early Church had had a structure similar to the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5). Jerome, for example, showed that the elder is one and the same with the bishop, while the churches of his time were governed by a mixed council of elders with a chosen presbyter as a leader. [519] The popes, however, changed this structure in order to be able to exercise their domination over the Christian world.

Presbyterianism was put into practice for the first time in 1541 in Geneva under the guidance of John Calvin. John Knox, after he spent his years of study following Calvin, returned to Scotland and convinced the Parliament to embrace the Reformation in 1590 and to abolish the jurisdiction of the Catholic Church. In the same year the *Book of Discipline* was published, through which rules of church governance were established and ten ecclesiastical districts with chosen supervisors (presbyters) were created. Thus, the Church of Scotland was reformed according to Calvinist lines and the local parishes adopted a Presbyterian or Congregational organization. [520]

Despite the interest in Hebrew culture, Hebraism was, ironically, a masked anti-Semitic trend. On the one hand, the English Protestants and later the American ones identified themselves as the spiritual inheritors of the Ten Lost Tribes – a groundless theory which evolved so much that in the 19th century the Anglo-Saxon race was said to have direct Jewish roots. On the other hand, the support for the restoration of the Jews as the rightful owners of Palestine was not necessarily favorable to the Jews. With the Jews regaining their homeland, the anti-Semites believed that Europe would finally be cleansed of these religious impurities, the imperialists hoped that a Jewish Palestine would be a good excuse for an English protectorate in the area and a possible solution for the Muslim threat, and, most importantly, the repatriation of the Jews meant that one of the requirements for Christ's return was fulfilled.

But Hebraism, with everything that this trend involved, amplified the eschatological expectations. In 1644 the Scottish Calvinist John Dury met the kabbalist Manasseh ben Israel in Portugal, who told him that the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel had been discovered on the American continent in the Ecuadorian province of Quito – a story previously reported by the traveler Antonio de Montezinos. [521] In 1649 Manasseh published *The Hope of Israel* based on Montezinos's accounts. The latter described how he had met in Brazil a mysterious nation of Indians which pretended to be the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Israel, and from the tribes of Reuben and Joseph. [522] Through an open letter addressed to Oliver Cromwell and the English Parliament, Manasseh ben Israel pleaded for the readmission of the Jews in England reasoning that "because the opinion of many Christians and mine do concur herein, that we both believe that the restoring time of our Nation into their native Country is very near at hand." [523]

In 1650 it was Thomas Thorowgood's turn to state that the Amerindians were part of the Ten Lost Tribes in *Ievves in America, or, the probabilities that Americans are of that race* :

> *They constantly and strictly separate their women in a little Wigwam by themselves in their feminine seasons ... they hold that Nanawitnawit (a God over head) made the Heavens and the Earth, and some tast of affinity with the Hebrew I have found. ... The rites, fashions, ceremonies, and opinions of the Americans are in many things agreeable to the custome of the Jewes, not onely prophane and common usages, but such as be called solemn and sacred. [524]*

John Dury read Thorowgood's manuscript and contributed to the subsequent editions. [525] But Roger L'Estrange confuted the image of the Israelite Amerindians in *Americans no jewes* (1652). According to L'Estrange, the link between the Amerindians and the ancient Jews was most likely rooted in legends regarding the missionary work of John Eliot. In reality, Eliot, surnamed the "apostle of the Indians," was rather interested in the conversion of the Amerindians than in proving their Hebrew roots. [526] And, although the Israelite origin of the Amerindians was never proved, it fed the imagination of Europeans and the colonists for at least two additional centuries and it became an essential part of Mormonism.

Hebraism, naturally, also gave rise to rumors, more or less founded. One said that in Northern Scotland a ship with sails and ropes made of silk had appeared, driven by sailors who were speaking Hebrew and the flag carrying the inscription “The Twelve Tribes of Israel.” The Jewish community of Avignon, France, prepared themselves to migrate to the new kingdom in the spring of 1666, at a time when the famous Sabbatai Zevi was being proclaimed the Messiah in Palestine. [527] In some parts of Europe the Jews even brought down the roof of their houses in preparation for a new exodus. Baruch Spinoza, a Dutch philosopher of Jewish origin, wrote about this phenomenon in a letter addressed to the German philosopher Heinrich Oldenburg: “Here there is a rumor everybody’s mouth that the Jews, who have been dispersed for more than two thousand years, are to return to their native country. ... which if it were true would seem to bring a crisis on the whole world.” [528]

In his 13th-century *Cronica* the Italian Salimbene di Adam reports that Frederick II conducted a weird experiment: he ordered foster-mothers and nurses to raise several newborns without communicating with them at all, and to not allow them at all to hear the language of the people. The eccentric emperor aimed through this experiment to discover the innate, God-given language of mankind , spoken by Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, all the children died. [529] A couple of centuries later James IV of Scotland repeated the experiment. In 1493 the king ordered two newborn babies to be sent to live on the isolated island of Inchkeith to be raised by a deaf-mute woman. And this time, allegedly, the children came to speak Hebrew. [530]

The self-identification with the Israelites was a prime component of the Protestant imagination. The sufferings, the deprivations and the permanent relocation made Protestants compare themselves with the fate of the Israelites and Rome with their oppressors. In 1641 John Milton expressed his disapproval of Catholicism and the episcopal system by presenting Rome as a contemporary Babylon and the bishops as Egyptian taskmasters. [531] For the traumatized Protestant minority the Jews were a model of cultural survival and of political and administrative organization. [532] *De Republica Hebraeorum* of the Dutch Petrus Cunaeus went through seven editions between 1617 and 1700, it was translated into three languages and it was the strongest assertion of republican theory in the early years of the Republic of

the Seven United Netherlands. Cunaeus was worried that the Dutch Republic might share the fate of Athens and Rome, a decline caused, from his point of view, by the luxurious life and selfish quarrels between the leaders. He presented the Israelite state from the period of the First Temple as a practical model for the new independent United Provinces. Because the laws came from the real God, Israel was not a democracy, oligarchy or monarchy, but an archetype of the ideal republic. [533] The Hebrew kings were constitutional monarchs, subjected to the natural law, emanated by the divine spirit of justice, with a special power over the nation's religious affairs. Likewise, the Hebrew Republic was a virtuous community of small republican farm owners, maintained in this form by the biblical law, which says that every fiftieth year (the Jubilee) all land transactions become null and the property goes back to the original owner. In this way all had equal income, the wealth of some did not degenerate into oppressing others, and the people did not leave their innocent occupation for other new and doubtful businesses. [534]

6.2.2. The Holy Temple and the sacred geometry

The possibility of finding the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and their repatriation to the Holy Land generated discussions about the next eschatological phase: the rebuilding of the Third Temple. The Antichrist has to become the leader of the Jews and to impose the Mosaic beliefs over the people he would conquer. But the Jewish rituals cannot be resumed without the Temple. According to the New Testament, through the reconstruction of the Temple a false and deceiving practice of worship is reinstalled (Romans 6:14-18; Hebrews 10:4). This was the reason why Jesus preached the destruction of the Temple (Matthew 24:2; Luke 21:5-6; Hebrews 9:8): the path had to be cleaned for the presence of God in people's hearts. The sacrifice of animals was stopped and the blood of Christ cleaned mankind from original sin and offered each man the possibility of redeeming himself.

The Hebrew beliefs depict the Temple as a "support" for the presence of God in the physical world, a bridge between the material and spiritual realms. But the Temple of Jerusalem is not one and the same with the Temple of Solomon; or at least not entirely. The Temple of Jerusalem or the Holy Temple refers to a series of structures located on Mount Moriah. Two temples had been successively built on this place, and a third one is going to

be built according to Jewish eschatology.

At first, the ancestors of Israel worshiped God in local sanctuaries or by building occasional altars on hills; Abraham built an altar to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:9). Then, during the Egyptian Exodus toward the Promised Land, Moses built the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31; 35-40). After the conquest of Palestine the Tabernacle was no longer suitable for the new religious and administrative requirements and the construction of a temple was decided. The First Temple was built by King Solomon sometime between 970 and 930 BC, and this became the religious, social and political center of the ancient Hebrew world (1 Kings 5-8; 2 Chronicles 1-9).

The First Temple was destroyed in 587 BC by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel experienced the vision about the eschatological role of the Temple in "the five and twentieth year of our captivity" (Ezekiel 40:1) and he recorded it in detail in his book. In 537 BC, after the Medo-Persian Empire destroyed the Babylonian Empire, the people of Israel were free again and the building of the Second Temple commenced at the initiative of Zerubbabel. After a short interruption, the construction resumed in 520 BC and it was finalized in 516 BC. According to Ezra, [535] the reconstruction of the Temple was authorized and supported by the Persian king Cyrus the Great (king between 576-529 BC) and ratified by Darius I the Great (king between 522-486 BC). Five centuries later, around 20 BC, the Second Temple was renovated by Herod the Great, and this is why this temple is also known as the "Herod's Temple." Finally, the Second Temple was razed to the ground by the Romans in 70 AD, with the exception of the western outer wall.

Since the last destruction of the Temple there have been several attempts to rebuild it, but every time fate was averse. Eusebius declared that God would not let the Jews rebuild the Holy Temple, a statement that remained known as the "curse of Eusebius." The first attempt to reconstruct it took place in 132 AD, when Simon Bar Kokhba took control of Jerusalem. But the uprising was quickly crushed by the Romans and the work was halted. Then, in the 4th century, the pagan Roman emperor Julian the Apostate started the project of restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. He fell in battle shortly after the project was started, and the subsequent

emperors abandoned the idea. Christian mythology says that fires, manifesting divine wrath, fell over those who tried to realize the plans of Emperor Julian. [536] In 610 the Sasanian Empire pushed the Byzantine Empire outside the Middle East and gave the control of Jerusalem to the Jews. The new leaders ordered the immediate resumption of animal sacrifices for the first time since the uprising of Bar Kokhba. But the Byzantines quickly recovered the lost territory and the partially built edifice was destroyed. The crusaders also rejected the idea of rebuilding the Temple. [537]

The rebuilding of the Temple is considered a landmark in the unfolding of the last days both by Jews and Christians. But this magnificent construction has been believed to offer much more than its eschatological role. As in the case of Noah's Ark or the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple's design fascinates due to its divine origin. God spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai and instructed him as to how to build the Tabernacle; Solomon received the structure of the House of God from his father David, who previously received it from God; and Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon when "the hand of Jehovah was upon" him (Ezekiel 40:1-2).

Although defective from an architectural point of view, the common thread of these revelations is the accentuation of the measurements. Hence, theologians and mystics of all colors concluded that these dimensions, deliberately offered in such a detail, are prophetic clues [538] or the key to a divine geometry and laws of the Universe. Irenaeus determined the number 666 from the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar, Hippolytus extracted the 6,000 years from the dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant, and Augustine related the dimensions of Noah's Ark to the dimensions of the human body. [539] Numbers are the substrate of the material world, while mathematics is the language of God. As special biblical numbers fueled the eschatological numerology, in the same way important constructions and objects from the Bible fed the idea of a sacred architecture.

The various dimensions of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant and the altar were given to Moses in the unit of measurement of the cubit. But besides the essential length of a cubit, Ezekiel enumerates other units of measurement used at the building of the Temple:

Ye shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath. The ephah

and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of a homer, and the ephah the tenth part of a homer: the measure thereof shall be after the homer. And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, five and twenty shekels, fifteen shekels, shall be your maneh (Ezekiel 45:10-12).

The ephah was a dry unit of measurement, the bath was for liquids, while the shekel was both a unit of weight and a currency. The detailed description of the Temple's contents, as it was, for example, the capacity given in baths of a container whose dimensions are given in cubits, opened the path for the attempt to restore the entire ancient Hebrew system of measurements.

Retrieving these measurements had both a practical and a spiritual importance. The units of measurement, together with the languages and the dialects, were believed to have been multiplied after the incident with the Tower of Babel. In the 17th century every city and province had its own standards. God placed great importance on the regularization of measurements. So, the reestablishment of a universal standard was a step toward the original divine regularization of mankind and the materialization of the New Jerusalem from Ezekiel's vision.

The medieval and Renaissance God was imagined as a faultless architect; in some paintings Jesus was depicted holding in his hand a compass with which he measures the heavens and the earth. Beauty was believed to lie in perfect proportions and ideal numbers, while the Bible abounds in numbers and proportions indicated by God. The Temple, which was built by Solomon through divine guidance, became a prototype of the sacred buildings. In the Middle Ages the places of worship often sheltered relics or sacred objects. To these were added symbols and measurements more or less visible in the architectural plan. Their aim was to endow the place with a bonus of sacredness and a greater connection between the parishioner and God. In France, the famous Notre-Dame Cathedral has the height of the first level of 30 royal feet, and the height of the second level of 60 royal feet – dimensions taken from the biblical descriptions of the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:2). At the Amiens Cathedral the portion of the center of the building, enclosed by four columns, forms a square with the side of 50 feet, resembling Noah's Ark (Genesis 6:15). Also, the height of the Amiens Cathedral is 144 Roman

feet. The Cathedral of Saint Peter of Beauvais has a height of 144 royal feet. Both structures copy the eternal city described by John in Revelation 21:17. [540] And last but not least, the Royal Seat of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, built by Philip II of Spain in the 16th century, is nothing but an attempt to make physically real the plan of the Temple in a Renaissance palace that reflects the harmonious relations of the cosmos. [541]

At the beginning of the 17th century the Temple came to public attention after the Jesuit Juan Bautista Villalpando published *Ezechielem explanationes* – a harmonious conjunction between Ezekiel's vision, his own interpretations and previous attempts of restoring the Temple. Urged by Philip II, Villalpando also made graphic representations of the Temple; his drawings were based on the assumption that the buildings of Jerusalem were located in parallel and orthogonal projection (Roman urban model) – an image compared by Villalpando with the image of God. [542] The Jesuit considered that the great cultures derived their architecture from that of the Temple. In this way he reconciled the Bible with the ancient architecture described in the texts of Vitrivius and brought proofs about the influence of God in classical architecture. [543]

Thanks to Villalpando in 1628 the German Jew Judah Leon Templo produced a tri-dimensional model of the Temple and displayed it in front of Charles II of England. In 1642 Templo published at Middelburg a compendious description entitled *Retrato del Templo de Selomoh* , and in 1654 he published *Retrato del Tabernaculo de Moseh* , a description of the Tabernacle of Moses, and *Tratado de la Arca del Testamento* , a work about the Ark of the Covenant. [544]

In 1666 the Great Fire of London completely destroyed St. Paul's Cathedral. The reconstruction of the edifice was assigned to the architect Christopher Wren. It cannot be said if he was influenced by Villalpando, but it is known that Wren was a Freemason and he believed that the English nation is the new chosen one and London is the New Jerusalem. Hence, it is speculated that Wren took measurements from the Solomon's Temple and included them in the structure of the "new temple," the new St. Paul's Cathedral. [545]

Isaac Newton dedicated an entire chapter to the subject of the Temple in *The chronology of ancient kingdoms amended* , published *post-mortem* in 1728.

He was inspired by the First Book of the Kings, a text he personally translated from the original Hebrew, and different contemporary and ancient sources, including the work of Villalpando. Newton believed that the ancient texts contain sacred wisdom and that the proportions of the ancient temples are sacred in themselves. This belief drove the English physicist to examine Greek and Roman architectural works in search for an occult knowledge. The ancient architects hid their knowledge in a symbolic and mathematical language that, when it is deciphered, reveals laws of nature. [546] Apparently, the measurements of the Temple refer to mathematical problems related to π (Pi – mathematical constant) or the volume of a hemisphere, to Earth's dimensions or even to the history of the Jews. Moreover, for Newton the geometry of the Temple was more than a gate to the unseen, abstract architecture of the Universe; it was also a way to improve construction techniques, a help given to constructors to build safer and more efficient edifices. [547]

6.2.3. James Ussher and the new age of the world

The main defect of the early chronologies was the fact that they were more mystical than historical, being influenced by the millennial week theory and the fate of the Roman Empire. Mysticism was very active in the 17th century as well, but the Renaissance demanded a more precise chronology in order to integrate biblical events in an adequate historical frame. Hebraism drove the English scholars toward the study of the original texts of the Old Testament, which led to new calculations and new conclusions regarding the age of the world.

After he had studied the Semitic languages and an impressive volume of ancient texts, James Ussher, Anglican Archbishop of Armagh, concluded that the Bible is a precise portrait of history. The work *Annales veteris testamenti* is a chronology of the world in Latin, with all the major events dated from the Creation until 70 AD, the year of the destruction of the Temple. The date that made Ussher famous appears in the first paragraph: "1. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. {Ge 1:1} The beginning of time, according to our chronology, happened at the start of the evening preceding the 23rd day of October (on the Julian calendar), 4004 BC or 710 JP." [548]

The calculation of the age of the world remained an extremely laborious matter, which required knowledge in several languages and disciplines. Yet, unlike predecessors such as Eusebius or Bede, the scholars of the Renaissance and Enlightenment had access to a wider spectrum of information. For Newton, the purpose of the chronology of the world was to depict the fluent intervention of God in time; the past explained the present and pointed toward the future return of Christ. In *The original of monarchies* (1701) and *The chronology of ancient kingdoms amended* (1728) he offered a detailed image regarding the birth, the evolution and the fall of different ancient kingdoms, especially the Israelite one. With the help of astronomical calculations he put a vast volume of ancient literature in a historical sequence and concluded that the Bible is the oldest text in the world and it is more precise than the Greek, Babylonian or Egyptian sources. [549]

Using more or less the same methods of calculation, Joseph Justus Scaliger set the Creation for 3949 BC, Isaac Newton for around 4000 BC, John Lightfoot for 3929 BC [550] and James Ussher for 4004 BC. In William Shakespeare's *As you like it* Rosalind says that the world is 6,000 years old (IV:1). Previously, Martin Luther established the date of the Creation in 3960 BC, [551] while his compatriot Johannes Kepler calculated in 3992 BC. [552] So, between the early chronologies and those in the 16th and 17th centuries there was a difference of about 1,500 years.

Ussher was inspired by Kepler, who in turn was inspired by the Polish Jesuit Laurentius Suslyga. In his dissertation, presented in 1605 at the University of Graz, Suslyga concluded that Jesus Christ was born in 4 BC, and not 1 AD as Dionysius Exiguus previously calculated. [553] Among other arguments, Suslyga said that Herod's son, Philip the Tetrarch, renamed the city of Betsaida after the daughter of Augustus, Julia. Given the fact that she was exiled from Rome by the emperor in 2 BC, Philip must have renamed the city before this date, and Herod had to die before Philip became leader. So, these aspects reposition the massacre of the innocents at least three years before 1 AD. Following Suslyga's argument, Kepler demonstrated that the Star of Bethlehem was in fact a conjunction between Jupiter, Saturn and Mars sometime between 7-6 BC, and this was followed by the birth of Christ a year or two later (Herod ordered the killing of the children under two years). [554]

Ussher's *Annales veteris testamenti* was published in the summer of 1650 in London. Four years later the archbishop added the second part, *Annalium pars posterior* . [555] Overall, the project produced 2,000 pages in Latin and occupied 20 years of Ussher's life. Its completion required advanced knowledge about the original languages of the biblical books and the doctrinal interpretation of the Bible, as well as what was known at that time regarding the ancient history of Persia, Greece and Rome.

The core of Ussher's research was the 21 generations of the Old Testament, starting with Adam and Eve. According to the Bible, people of the past have enjoyed longevity: Adam, for example, lived 930 years, while Adams's great-great-great-great-great-grandson, Methuselah, holds the record of longevity with 969 years (Genesis 5:27). But knowing the age of the 21 generations was not enough; Ussher also had to determine the age of each individual at the time when a new generation was born, because their lives were intertwined. Furthermore, the mission of the scholars has always been complicated by the fact that the Bible was compiled from different sources that extend over many centuries, with different versions of calculating the temporal distances. Therefore, a simple addition of the biblical dates and eras is somehow useless. Even the famous genealogical tree from Matthew 1 and Luke 3 is more a riddle than a historical guide.

For the timeline between Adam and Solomon the archbishop used the Masoretic version of the Bible, due to its uninterrupted tradition of carefully transcribing the holy texts. From Solomon to Christ he had to research non-Christian and non-Jewish sources and to correlate biblical events with datable events in other cultures. [556] He got an important help from the list of Babylonian kings conceived by the Greek astronomer Ptolemy in the 2nd-century. In this way Ussher established a rough date of the Creation in 4000 BC. Then he moved it four years backwards, in 4004 BC, taking into account Kepler's arguments. In addition, the historian Flavius Josephus shows that the death of Herod the Great happened in 4 BC; consequently, Jesus had to be born sometime between 37 BC (when Herod came to power) and 4 BC. [557]

The period between Adam and the destruction of the Temple was split into six ages, according to key moments of human history: 4004 BC: the Creation; 2348 BC: Noah's Flood; [558] 1921 BC: the call of Abraham by God; 1491

BC: the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt; 1012 BC: the foundation of the Temple was laid by Solomon; 585 BC: the destruction of Jerusalem and the start of the Babylonian captivity; 4 BC: the birth of Christ. Unlike the other chronologies of the time; the version advanced by the Irish archbishop captured the public's attention due to its millennial markers: there are exactly 3,000 years between the Creation and the completion of the Temple, and exactly 1,000 years between the Temple and the birth of Christ, the Latter being the spiritual fulfillment of the Temple. [559]

The season of the Creation was also the subject of theological disputes. According to the Chaldean and Babylonian beliefs, the Creation took place in spring. Ussher opted instead for the season of autumn because it marks the beginning of the Jewish year. The world was created on a date that corresponds to the Sun situated at one of the four cardinal points – either winter or summer solstice, or spring or autumn equinox – based on the belief that God was an architect who created a harmonious universe. However, the decisive factor in Ussher's choice was the interpretation of Genesis. When Adam and Eve found themselves in the Garden of Eden the fruits were ripe. And the infamous fruit (traditionally considered to have been an apple) bitten by the first people could not have been ripe unless there was a day of autumn. [560]

The 17th century marked the last major collective effort to determine the date of Creation, while Ussher's conclusions enjoyed tremendous success for almost a century. But toward the end of the 18th century the idea of the world's chronology fell into desuetude both from a theological point of view, considered to be inconsistent, and from a scientific point of view, being refuted by the theory of evolution.

6.3. THE SECTARIANISM OF THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

In 1625 Charles I took the throne of England as the successor of James I, and his reign proved to be an endless struggle between Royalty and the Parliament. It was a period marked by conflicts, plots, assassinations, intrigues, open violence and street movements. Between 1629 and 1640 the king managed to obtain absolute power and he ruled England without the Parliament, but he gradually lost the loyalty of his supporters. As a result, amid the political and religious dissensions, in 1642 the English Civil War

erupted.

The first part of the war, between 1642 and 1646, and the second part, between 1648 and 1649, were characterized by the instigation of the supporters of Charles I against the supporters of the Long Parliament. The third part of the war, between 1649 and 1651, consisted in the fight between the supporters of Charles II and the supporters of the Rump Parliament. The Civil War led to the execution of Charles I, the exile of his son Charles II and the replacing of the monarchy with the republican governments. In 1649 the Commonwealth was instituted until 1653, followed afterwards by two Protectorates of Oliver Cromwell and Richard Cromwell. The Civil War ended with the victory of the Parliament at the Battle of Worcester on September 3, 1651. The Commonwealth was briefly reestablished between 1659 and 1660, before the restoration of the monarchy in the person of Charles II.

Between the collapse of the totalitarian-monarchical system of government and the establishment of the parliamentary one, 1640-1680 were years of unprecedented freedom. Stimulated by the fall of the old certainties and by millennial enthusiasm, by the possibility to freely meet and discuss, English society was experiencing the most diverse feelings. For some like John Milton the nation was heading toward a glorious destiny. During the Interregnum the poet depicted England as being saved from the traps of a worldly monarchy, as a new chosen nation of God, led by a Moses of the last days in the person of Oliver Cromwell. [561] Such expectations shaped the convenient notion that the Millennium would be first established in England, and only after that in the rest of the world. [562] For others, the anticipated collapse of England was a prelude for the collapse of the world. [563] Either way, the sense of social dissolution, the installation of chaos on all the levels of society and the fall of the Episcopal system gave rise to a wide range of discussions about how society should be restructured.

The philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke built systems of political philosophy. *Leviathan* (1651) and *Two Treaties of Government* (1689) promoted systems of government based on human reason. [564] Oliver Cromwell had the ambition to govern with a plutocratic parliament voted by an electorate of the rich. But back then the common Englishmen saw politics

and religion as brother and sister and they thought about politics in religious terms. The Royalists wished to crown Charles II and to maintain monarchism according to the biblical tradition started by Saul and David, in contrast to parliament, which has no biblical support and is a purely human creation. Groups such as the Fifth Monarchists instigated for the establishment of a theocracy in order to prepare the path for Parousia. Gerrard Winstanley's Diggers defended a radical-agrarian solution, while for others, such as Colonel Thomas Harrison or Lieutenant Colonel William Goffe, adopting one political system or another was irrelevant because God was about to come and establish his own order. [565]

The turmoil of the English Civil War was the promised land for dissident political-religious groups because the overthrow of the monarchy significantly weakened the Anglican censorship. These groups were not political parties in the way they are understood today, but people gathered around certain beliefs. More precisely, they were a combination between political party, sect and secret society. Most of them had been founded before the Civil War, but they took advantage of the social chaos to come forward and make themselves heard. And, even though they supported different points of view, their rhetoric was similar. Furthermore, the individual allegiance to one group or another was very fluid, with the possibility to concurrently adhere to more groups. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between those who categorically militated for the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom, those who demanded the return to the pure worship of the early Church and the rejection of the Catholic ritualism, or those who wanted England's laws to reflect a higher degree of morality.

Of all the movements, the Levellers were the most balanced in their demands. Without a coherent agenda, but determined to uproot corruption, the Levellers were guided by the writings of the agitator John Lilburne. They asked for the sovereignty of the people, the extended vote, equality before the law and religious tolerance. For Richard Overton freedom is an innate feature of every person, while Lilburne coined the expression "freeborn rights," defined as rights with which every human being is born, in opposition to the rights bestowed by government through laws. [566]

By contrast, the Adamites were the weirdest. Although they were few in

number, they became notorious due to their shocking manners. The Adamites claimed to have regained the primordial innocence of Adam and Eve, they lived in total lawlessness, practiced the “sacred nudism” and rejected the institution of marriage on the reason that it had been established as a consequence of original sin. Their parades of nudity aimed to demonstrate that a person can regain the innocence of the first people through complete denial of garments and achieving shamelessness regarding his own and others’ nakedness. Thus, the Millennium would be established only when all people would accept nakedness and would live in peace. [567]

Indeed, garment denial has been practiced by saints or prophets, but in an entirely different context. The rejection of all earthly goods and the concept of equality of all men in front of God were usual motivations for total undressing. But nudity was a taboo during the Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan periods; at the time the elites, especially women, were maltreating their bodies with oversized and super-ornate clothes. The fashion aimed to hide the body as much as possible. So, Adamism was a protest against the social conventions and a burst of insanity that resembled more the orgiastic Roman festivals than the worship of Christ.

The Ranters were similar to the Adamites. Concentrated around London, without a leader or an inner organization, Ranterism was a quasi-millennial group which subscribed to Joachim of Fiore’s Age of the Spirit. The Ranters manifested themselves among the poor and they did not wait for a physical return of Christ, but they believed that his Second Coming was inward, within the believers (a sort of invisible return). The Ranterist God was present in everything; the divine essence was as much in the ivy leaf as in the most glorious angel (pantheism). Hence, Christians were not subjected to any moral law (antinomianism). The Ranters did not hesitate to make parades of public nudity as well. They were even suspected of practicing the transfer of partners, illicit sex and other depraved activities. [568]

The Seekers were established through the sermons of the three Legatt brothers, active in London between 1590 and 1612. The Legatt brothers declared all the existing churches corrupt and proclaimed themselves the new apostles of God destined to form a new pure church. They requested absolute religious freedom: an entirely voluntary exercise of faith and the toleration of

heresy, blasphemy, Catholicism, non-Christian religions and even atheism. In fact, the Seekers promoted the respect and indifference regarding all other beliefs, without accepting any of them as authoritative. Instead, they preferred to wait for Parousia and the establishment of the real Church by Christ himself. Instead of religious services, the Seekers held meetings free of any ecclesiastical ritual, quietly, waiting for God's revelation. [569]

The Quakers, or the Religious Society of Friends were founded by George Fox, who heard the voice of Christ and started to preach in 1648. According to the Quakers, God directly speaks with every person and guides our lives, without the need for intermediaries such as priests or prophets. They rejected the idea of churches, all forms of religious symbolism and visible sacraments (such as baptism), but accepted the priesthood of all believers. The Quakerist worship did not have an individual in charge to lead the service; instead, the believers gathered in silence, which was interrupted only when someone felt the need to speak at the urge of the Holy Spirit. The Quakers considered themselves the restoration of the true Church of Jesus Christ, after centuries of apostasy. [570] They were in fact more concerned with the moral invigoration of their society than with millenarist activism. The work *The vials of the wrath of God upon the seat of the Man of Sin* of George Fox was more a condemnation of football and wrestling, which Fox sought to outlaw together with theater, music, paintings, horse racings or anything else that could feed people's pleasures. [571]

Most groups rose due to the need of political and religious reform. But Gerrard Winstanley's Diggers were driven by shortages and hunger. At a time when all energy and resources of the country were being channeled to feed the outrageous luxury of the monarchy, the Diggerist doctrine was a protest against the social stratification and the greedy elites. Winstanley tried to create communities on communistic criteria, agrarian, with the abolishment of private property and class difference according to the model of the early Christians (Acts 2:44-45). Under the New Covenant there are no slaves and masters, Jews and Christians, women and men; all people are equal and everyone has the right to work the land received from God to feed himself and his family. As in the case of the Ranters, for Winstanley Parousia was an inner event; Jesus would live in every man and woman, with no exception, and during the Millennium all people would be organized in

agrarian communal societies. [572]

The Reevonians, or the “Radical Puritans,” have the merit of being the most hilarious. In 1651, after God spoke in his “ear as a man speaks to his friend,” [573] John Reeve believed that he and his cousin Lodowicke Muggleton, two ordinary tailors, were the two witnesses of the Apocalypse. Although the text from Revelation 11:3 makes no distinction between the two entities, Reeve described himself as a second Moses, while Muggleton took the role of a second Aaron. [574] But the two tailors were far from a life of holiness or divine guidance; the historian Thomas Macaulay describes Muggleton as “a mad tailor [who] wandered from pothouse to pothouse, tippling ale, and denouncing eternal torments against all those who refused to believe, on his testimony, that the Supreme Being was only six feet high, and that the sun was just four miles from the earth.” [575]

In the 17th century Europe was suffocated by rumors about conspiracies, secret societies or brotherhoods with obscure interests. In England, this aspect was exacerbated by the Civil War, when the Protestants saw popish plots everywhere, while the clashes between the Royalists and the supporters of the Protectorate were carried out through instigations, embezzlements, plots and assassinations. In the given context, groups such as the Philadelphian Society for the Advancement of Piety and Divine Philosophy chose to hide itself in order to survive. Jane Leade of Norfolk, one of the Philadelphian founders, was only 15 when an angelic voice urged her to abandon frivolity and to dedicate herself to the occult. The Virgin Sophia – the feminine side of God described in the biblical book of the Proverbs – promised her that she would reveal to her the secrets of the Universe and the moment of the end of the world. The name “Philadelphian” was taken from Revelation 3:7-12, because Leade believed that her group is one of the seven churches that would have an important role in the final acts of history. Nevertheless, the Philadelphians rejected the idea of being a church; they preferred instead the term “society.” [576]

Even though the radical groups alternated between peaceful proselytism and virulent preachings in their relation to the decadent society, only one used violence and the power of weapons to impose its ideology: the Fifth Monarchy Men. The name “Fifth Monarchy Men” (or the Fifth Monarchists)

was a biblical reference and geopolitical theory based on the prophecy of the five empires from Daniel 2. Three of the empires were elucidated within the biblical text as being the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian and the Greek-Macedonian empires. Christian tradition identified the fourth empire with the Roman Empire. The last empire, symbolized by Daniel through "the stone that smote the image became a great mountain" (Daniel 2:35), was believed by the Fifth Monarchists to refer to Christ's millennial reign. In February 1649, shortly after the head and the body of Charles I took separate ways, the Council of Officers was petitioned through an anonymous document – the first manifesto of the Fifth Monarchists. The letter, largely based on John Henry Archer's *The personal reign of Christ upon Earth* (1642), [577] suggested, among many other things, that the kingdom of Christ was imminent and all the worldly governments had to be abolished before the expiration of the 1,260 years. [578] Although absurd, according to an observer of that time such expectations and requests were a daily occurrence:

> *Some that have heard that the end of Paganism is placed in the year 395 ... will easily be induced to believe that the famous number, 1260, ought to be added to it; and then this year, 1655, must be pointed out for an apocalyptical epocha. Others pitch upon the year 1656, because, having summed up the lives of the patriarchs in the fifth chapter of Genesis, they find 1656 years from the creation to the flood, and thence infer, that the coming of Christ will be the next year, because it must be as in the days of Noah. [To 325 (the Council of Nice was in) add 1332, that is, twice 666, the sum will be 1657.] Others will wait three or four years more, hoping that the 1260 years must be reckoned from the death of Theodosius. ... Nor need we wonder, if we find some confident that eleven years hence we shall see the fatal change, because of the number 666. [579]*

On April 20, 1653, when Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament, the Fifth Monarchists took the opportunity to promote their ideology. The preacher John Rogers and Major-General Thomas Harrison, who commanded the troops which aided Cromwell in taking power, encouraged Cromwell to institute a body of government similar to the Jewish Sanhedrin. [580] In the end, Cromwell and the Council of Officers decided to institute the Barebone's Parliament, composed of members nominated according to their

moral and religious virtues. [581] With approximately 60 of the 140 members that supported legal reforms on religious grounds, the Barebone's Parliament was the English governing body closest to a theocracy.

However, fearing religious radicalism, the moderates led by Cromwell conspired to dissolve the Parliament. On December 12, 1653, the faction led by Major-General John Lambert manipulated a vote to dissolve the Barebone's Parliament, and on the 16th of December a new constitution was established with Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector. This angered the Fifth Monarchists and the other groups that sought the personal and religious freedom promised during the Civil War. Cromwell appeared to have betrayed them for his own political ambitions and England seemed to have failed in its divine mission, only trading one evil master (the Monarchy) for another (the Protectorate).

Through an act of political purge, at the beginning of 1654 the new power denounced the Fifth Monarchists as a collection of diseased brains and arrested important leaders. Most of the Fifth Monarchists quickly dissipated, with the exception of the group led by Thomas Venner. Between 1656 and 1657 Venner and his followers conceived an elaborate plan to overthrow the Cromwellian government. This included the free distribution of leaflets to the public to inform it about their demands and about the Cromwellian treachery. They hoped to create a wave of social unrest that would degenerate into revolution, but the plot proved to be a total failure. On April 9, 1657, 23 conspirators were captured and Venner was incarcerated in the Tower of London until 1659. [582]

After the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, the institution of Lord Protector was passed to his son Richard, who freed the Fifth Monarchists through an act of clemency. But Richard's lack of determination caused him to be replaced by the reinstalled Rump Parliament in 1659. Again, this organism was not able to satisfy the expectations of English society as a whole. The general unrest led the political agents to seek a more stable political and social institution, identified again with the monarchy. Consequently, in 1660 the Parliament began negotiations with the House of Stuart in the person of Charles II, the son of Charles I.

Despite the fact that the Civil War and the experiment of the Protectorate set

new parameters to the relation between the state, the Parliament and the Crown, and the dialog with Charles II did not mean a return to the former politics, the religious radicals felt betrayed and persecuted. The new king considered that the chief responsible parties for the death of his parent had been the dissident groups, and consequently he sought to discourage nonconformity and to secure the dominance of Anglicanism. Faced with the real possibility of seeing England subdued again by monarchy and popery, Venner decided that the best chance to carry out God's plan was to take power through a new *coup d'état* before it was too late. [583] Between January 1-4, 1661, approximately 50 radicals repeatedly attacked the centers of power within and around London. By spreading fear and killing anyone who opposed them, the rebels aimed to create such a chaos that would destabilize the government. But the influx of professional soldiers quickly suppressed the insurgency. Most rebels were killed. Subsequently, as a preventive measure, another 100 Fifth Monarchists, Quakers and members of other sects were incarcerated. These had not been necessarily active in the rebellion, but they were labeled as potential threats due to their criticism regarding the new order. Venner and other rebels were hanged on January 19, 1661, after which their dead bodies were sliced, put in stakes and exposed to the public. [584]

6.4. 1666: THE BLACK PLAGUE AND THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

It is strange that in the first part of the Middle Ages historical documents said nothing about apocalyptic manifestations related to the year 666, but there were fears related to 1666. The year 1666 is no more apocalyptic than 666, although it might be seen as the sum between the Millennium (1,000) and the number of the Beast (666). The similarity between 1666 and the number of the Antichrist was obvious, but it came in contradiction with the apostle's words: "here is wisdom"; there was nothing wise in looking in the calendar and seeing that the year 1666 was approaching. [585]

Same as in the 14th century, the havoc of the plague represented God's tangible and immediate fury. The years 1665-1667 were years of horror for the Londoners. The writings of the time portray a terrifying picture of the society affected by this ruthless disease. Although it is considered to be a work of fiction, Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) is based

on a solid documentation and describes in great detail the physical and mental effects the plague had had upon the citizens.

The plague struck London in the worst possible moment, when it was most crowded. After the restoration of the monarchy, the capital city was invaded by craftsmen and traders keen to make money; Defoe compared it with Jerusalem full of Jews before it was besieged by the Romans on Passover. [586] The impact was swift: from tens of deceased per day, after the coming of the spring warmth the number increased to a couple of hundreds. [587] Precautionary measures were taken, most of them completely useless: letters and coins were sprayed with vinegar, purifying fires were started at crossroads, the houses were "disinfected" with perfumes and brimstone, or some citizens walked on the street with a mask shaped as a bird beak, filled with spices and aromatic herbs to alleviate the stench. According to a medieval preconception, the plague was being spread by birds and insects. [588]

The authorities instituted public days of prayer and fast in order to temper God's wrath. Theaters were banned from June 1665 until December 1666. Games, feasts and other meetings were interrupted as well. [589] Some measures, however, were totally wrong: cats and dogs began to be killed because they were thought responsible for spreading the plague or they were believed to be disguised witches. In this way the rats, which were carrying in their fur the fleas with plague, multiplied even more, which led to the intensification of the pestilence. [590] The remedies prescribed were primitive and the patients were uselessly tortured. The doctors thought that they could overcome the disease if they managed to cauterize the purulent swellings (buboes) and the recalcitrant tumors. Some buboes were so hard that they were opened with an instrument, many patients dying raving mad because of the pain. [591]

The epidemic had a devastating psychological effect on the survivors. Everywhere there was concern and cries. Despair and fear altered human reason so much that it brought the population to a state of semi-savagery. The stench reminded those alive that death was one step away and everyone wondered when his turn would come. The citizens thronged to escape the unsanitary congested cities or crowded into churches. Approximately 200,000 people left London wandering in the surrounding forests, without

shelter, food and water, only with their clothes on them. In the rural areas food and accommodation prices became exorbitant, raised by peasants eager to get wealthy. The royal family also fled to Oxfordshire. [592] Generally, people thought that the best solution for the plague it was to run out of its way: [593]

> *nothing was to be seen but waggons and carts, with goods, women, servants, children ... all loaded with baggage and fitted out for travelling, as any one might perceive by their appearance. This was a very terrible and melancholy thing to see, and as it was a sight which I could not look on from morning to night.* [594]

Those who remained acted as if they were under siege: they barricaded themselves in houses, nailed the windows and the doors and minimized the contact with the rest of the world. If one family member got sick, he was quickly isolated; when he died, the body was extracted through the window with ropes, from where he was taken with some hangers, put into a cart and transported to mass graves. The number of deaths increased so much that funeral services were abandoned. The dead were collected from the streets like garbage and thrown into the grave without any other ceremony. [595] People were desperately searching for explanations for what was happening. In this way the astrologers and the doctors emptied the pockets of the naive by seeding fear and promising false cures: [596]

> *the fears of the people were young, they were increased strangely by several odd accidents, which put altogether, it was really a wonder the whole body of the people did not rise as one man and abandon their dwellings, leaving the place as a space of ground designed by heaven for an Akeldama* [597] *, doomed to be destroyed from the face of the earth, and that all that would be found in it would perish with it. I shall name but a few of these things; but sure they were so many, and so many wizards and cunning people propagating them, that I have often wondered there was any (women especially) left behind. In the first place, a blazing star or comet appeared for several months before the plague, as there did, the year after, another, ... one foretold a heavy judgment, slow but severe, terrible, and frightful, as was the plague. But the other foretold a stroke, sudden, swift, and fiery, as was the*

conflagration ... The apprehensions of the people were likewise strangely increased by the error of the times, in which, I think, the people, from what principle I cannot imagine, were more addicted to prophecies, and astrological conjurations, dreams, and old wives' tales, than ever they were before or since: … all, or most part of which, foretold, directly or covertly, the ruin of the city; [598] ... To this, as I said before, the astrologers added stories of the conjunctions of planets in a malignant manner and with a mischievous influence, one of which conjunctions was to happen, and did happen, in October, and the other in November; and they filled the people's heads with predictions on these signs of the heavens, intimating that those conjunctions foretold drought, famine, and pestilence. [599]

The plague was an invisible enemy, completely misunderstood from a scientific point of view. In the works of that period the plague was transposed as a fire of arrows thrown by God upon the sinners, or as an angry angel on the clouds with a sword of fire, like the warrior angels of the Apocalypse. Another image depicted a baby clung on the frozen breast of his mother's corpse, while Death was personified and portrayed as a skeleton that gallops over the corpses. Terrified, the people were seeing signs, visions and apparitions everywhere:

Next to these public things were the dreams of old women; or, I should say, the interpretation of old women upon other people's dreams; and these put abundance of people even out of their wits. Some heard voices warning them to be gone, for that there would be such a plague in London so that the living would not be able to bury the dead; others saw apparitions in the air, and I must be allowed to say of both, I hope without breach of charity, that they heard voices that never spake, and saw sights that never appeared; ... "Yes! I see it all plainly," says one; "there's the sword as plain as can be;" another saw the angel; one saw his very face, and cried out," What a glorious creature he was!" One saw one thing, and one another. I looked as earnestly as the rest, but ... I said, indeed, that I could see nothing but a white cloud, bright on one side, by the shining of the sun upon the other part. ... she turned to me, called me profane fellow, and a scoffer, told me that it was a time of God's anger, and dreadful judgments were approaching, and that

despisers, such as I, should wander and perish. [600]

There was also a desperate search for scapegoats: foreigners, travelers, lepers and the Jews. All over Europe pogroms and witch hunts erupted. In any situation of extreme crisis human authority loses its powers. For the religious dissidents this was a good opportunity for revenge; they pointed without fear toward the throne of Charles II and claimed that the plague was God's punishment for the restoration of the monarchy. From the "people of God" during the Interregnum, the English people were now experiencing the Egyptian plagues. [601] The Black Plague was believed to be only the beginning of the end, and the hard part was about to come. One of the causes of the calamity was believed to be the vicious character of the people: "any should have hearts so hardened, in the midst of such calamity, as to rob and steal; yet certain it is that all sorts of villanies, and even levities and debaucheries, were then practiced in the town, as openly as ever." [602] Instead, some people sought in vain divine mercy openly confessing their crimes:

> *Many a robbery, many a murder, was then confessed aloud, and nobody surviving to record the accounts of it. People might be heard, even into the streets as we passed along, calling upon God for mercy, through Jesus Christ, and saying, "I have been a thief," "I have been an adulterer," "I have been a murderer," and the like, and none durst stop to make the least inquiry into such things or to administer comfort to the poor creatures, that in the anguish both of soul and body thus cried out.* [603]

Others lived liberating experiences; while he was "profligating" in sports games, John Bunyan heard an inner voice asking him: "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven or have thy sins and go to hell?" [604] This doubtful epiphany convinced Bunyan that he was a prophet of the last days, a sort of a second Paul, the "chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). In 1665 Bunyan compared the plague with the Egyptian plagues and warned his contemporaries that Christ would soon come as a fire. [605] The fanatics cursed the city and its inhabitants and screamed about the dreadful judgment of God:

> *nay, some were so enthusiastically bold as to run about the streets with their oral predictions, pretending they were sent to preach to the city;*

and one in particular, who, like Jonah to Nineveh, cried in the streets, "Yet forty days, and London shall be destroyed." I will not be positive whether he said "yet forty days," or "yet a few days." Another ran about naked, except a pair of drawers about his waist, crying day and night, like a man that Josephus mentions, who cried, "Woe to Jerusalem!" a little before the destruction of that city: so this poor naked creature cried, "O! the great, and the dreadful God!" and said no more, but repeated those words continually, with a voice and countenance full of horror, a swift pace, and nobody could ever find him to stop, or rest, or take any sustenance, at least that ever I could hear of. ... These things terrified the people to the last degree; [606]

The Quaker Solomon Eccles was another fanatic who terrorized the Londoners. [607] Shoemaker by trade, during the plague he ran on the streets with an improvised fire on his head, urging the citizens to repent:

Some went roaring, and crying, and wringing their hands along the street; some would go praying and lifting up their hands to heaven, calling upon God for mercy. I cannot say, indeed, whether this was not in their distraction; but, be it so, it was still an indication of a more serious mind, when they had the use of their senses, and was much better, even as it was, than the frightful yellings and cryings that every day, and especially in the evenings, were heard in some streets. I suppose the world has heard of the famous Solomon Eagle, an enthusiast; he, though not infected at all, but in his head, went about, denouncing of judgment upon the city in a frightful manner; sometimes quite naked, and with a pan of burning charcoal on his head. What he said or pretended, indeed, I could not learn. ... many began to think, and even to say, that there would none escape; and, indeed, I began to think so, too. [608]

The burning charcoal reminded the Londoners that their city would share the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities destroyed by God through fire due to the unfaithfulness of their inhabitants (Genesis 19). In September 1666, as many expected, London literally became an inferno: a fire of unprecedented scale erupted in the heart of the city and it spread over an area of 160 hectares in only three days. After the plague's wrath, the monstrous fire conflagration

occurred to seal the fate of the English people. The plague decimated the population slowly and in terrible torments. The fire was about to do it quickly, purifying the earth of men and sin. [609] This was the rain of fire sent by God as it is shown in Revelation 8:

> *I believe there was never any such desolation by fire since the destruction of Jerusalem, nor will be till the last and general conflagration. Had your lordship been at Kensington you would have thought – for five days together, for so long the fire lasted – it had been Doomsday, and that the heavens themselves had been on fire; and the fearful cries and howlings of undone people did much increase the resemblance. [610]*

According to *The London Gazette* from September 3, 1666, the fire was the heavy Hand of God upon Londoners for their sins. [611] Instead, the antiquarian Anthony Wood was confused as to why the calamity fell upon the English people and not upon Rome: "All astrologers did use to say Rome should have an end and Antichrist should come, 1666, but the prophecie fell upon London." [612] Because it started from *Pudding Lane* and stopped at *Pye Corner* , the fire was seen as a punishment for greed and voracity. In the same year 1666 the monument *The Golden Boy of Pye Corner* was raised, carrying the inscription: "This Boy is in Memmory Put up for the late Fire of London Occasion'd by the Sin of Gluttony."

There is no doubt that 1666 was a year of great tragedies. However, in 1667 the poet John Dryden had the courage to publish a poem in which he named it *Annus Mirabilis* (the "Year of Miracles"). Dryden categorized it as wonderful because in his opinion it could have been much worse. Given the fact that 666 is the number of the Antichrist, the real disasters were avoided, God saved England from destruction, and the nation was likened to the bird Phoenix, which revives from its own ashes. [613] It is not mentioned in Dryden's poem, but in 1666 Isaac Newton discovered the law of universal gravitation. The plague led to the closure of the University of Cambridge, and thus the physicist had time and space for research work. And last but not least, despite the immediate tragedies, the Great Fire stopped the spreading of the plague by killing the carriers, the mice and the fleas.

The plague and the fire altered the relations between Catholics and

Protestants and threw a new light upon the young restored monarchy. At the initiative of the king, a 61-meter high monument was erected near *Pudding Lane* to commemorate the Great Fire. But in 1681, during the scandal of the Popish Plot to kill the king, on the monument appeared incriminating inscriptions against Catholicism:

> *This pillar was set up in perpetual remembrance of the most dreadful burning of this Protestant city, begun and carried on by the treachery and malice of the Popish faction, in the beginning of September; in the year of our Lord 1666, in order to the carrying on their horrid plot for extirpating the Protestant religion and old English liberty, and introducing Popery and slavery.* *[614]*

From the Restoration in 1661 until the Glorious Revolution in 1688 the English Protestants feared that their country might become again dominated by popery through the coronation of a Catholic king. Accordingly, many of them chose the path of exile, on the continent or in America. This fueled the American millenarism and the idea that America has a sacred purpose. But in 1688 the English Parliament invited William of Orange to dethrone the Catholic James II, the brother of Charles II. In addition, the Catholics were dismissed from all public offices and a limited tolerance regarding the nonconformist Protestants was instituted. The Glorious Revolution eliminated any chance of restoring the Catholic power in England: for the following 100 years the Catholics did not have the right to vote, the right to be part of the Parliament or the right to enroll in the army; the monarch was forbidden to be a Catholic or to marry a Catholic, thus ensuring a Protestant succession. [615]

6.5. ISAAC NEWTON AND THE DECLINE OF ASTROLOGY

The separation between science and superstition was a process that lasted more than three centuries. The increasingly accepted mechanical theory of causality and the image of a tri-dimensional Universe were the main causes of the decline of astrology. At the beginning of the 16th century the Polish Nicolaus Copernicus issued the heliocentric theory, but he was ignored. Then, the Italian Giordano Bruno dared to say that the Sun is only a star

among an infinity of other stars, but the Inquisition burned him at the stake. Galileo Galilei reaffirmed heliocentrism and decisively contributed to the deterministic and infinite conception of the Universe. [616] Finally, the German Johannes Kepler believed that the geometrical figures were the primordial models of the Creator in the decoration of the entire world, [617] which was created according to a plan accessible to man through reason. The "heavenly physics" – as Kepler named it – is that part of mathematics which studies the divine architecture and the connection between the physical and spiritual layers of Creation. The Universe itself was believed to be an image of God, with the Sun corresponding to the Father, the stellar sphere corresponding to the Son, and the space between them corresponding to the Holy Spirit. [618]

By applying quantitative measurements to terrestrial and celestial phenomena, the scholars started to draw the line between science, superstition and pseudoscience. In the 17th century there was still not a clear distinction between astronomy and astrology, but there was a separation between astronomy (a part of mathematics within the liberal arts) and physics (a part of natural philosophy). On the other hand, even though an increasing number of priests and preachers denounced the astrological prediction of the future as blasphemous or misleading, [619] depriving celestial phenomena of any significance was not an option. The Bible shows repeatedly that there is a relation between God's will and what happens in heaven, while celestial wonders had been constantly mentioned in the Christian prophetic literature. Unlike the astrologers, who claimed that the heavens are a mechanism that exerts a direct influence upon the world, for the church God is the only active force and the celestial signs are simple messages (warnings) of the deity.

Naturally, the year 1666 was an irresistible astrological attraction. [620] But right before the plague and the Great Fire astrology got a serious blow on the occasion of the solar eclipse of 1652. The pamphlet *The Levellers almanack: for the year of wonders 1652* offered an astrological interpretation to the eclipse by placing it in a context of miracles and wonders. [621] The astrologer William Lilly depicted the eclipse as a sign of the collapse of Scottish Presbyterianism, while members of the Fifth Monarchy believed it would mark the establishment of the Millennium. [622] Rumors compared the darkness of the eclipse with the ninth Egyptian plague, while the Earl of Leicester recorded that during the morning hours the people almost refused to

leave their houses.

In a sermon preached on the Sunday before the eclipse in front of the London elites, the pastor Fulk Bellers declared that eclipses are often followed by good periods rather than hard times, and the fear of them has pagan roots. Instead, they should be seen as allegorical opportunities for meditation, because sunlight deprivation is analogous to the human deprivation of grace, or they can be taken as allegories of the Last Judgment. [623] Such arguments aimed to exclude eclipses from the category of prodigiousness and fantasticalness. Instead, as rhythmical and predictable events, they had to be studied as a natural part of the godly architecture of the Universe. The increase in knowledge changed mankind's perspective regarding nature, which subsequently led to a change of our point of view regarding God. This was a period of scientific enthusiasm, saluted in a very original way by the Italian astrologer Giovanni Battista Hodierna. In *Il nunzio del secolo cristallino* (1628) Hodierna copied the Joachimite theory of the ages and delimited six periods in human knowledge starting with the Creation. The first was the age of gold, followed by that of silver, copper and iron, in the end reaching the age of lead used in firearms. Almost begun, said Hodierna, was the age of crystal (or glass), when the telescope would help mankind understand the cosmos, and the microscope would allow the discovery of the molecular world. Hodierna foresaw a triumph of the human intellect in a new age of culture, an age in which knowledge would reach a level that would allow the human being to control all its negative impulses. This new age was going to be the biblical Millennium. [624] And to a certain extent Hodierna was right: a new age was appearing on the horizon of time: it was not the Millennium, but the Age of Enlightenment.

No one better represents the Age of Enlightenment than Isaac Newton, the father of modern science. His law of universal gravitation combined terrestrial and celestial mechanics, previously developed by Kepler and Galileo, in a system that seemed to explain the entire Universe in mathematical formulas. But Newton was rather fascinated by the Bible and mysticism than science; [625] one of his ambitions was to discover the philosopher's stone – a material believed to have the property to transform any metal into gold and which can provide eternal youth. [626] The English physicist used biblical exegesis to unlock the rational structure of the

Universe and to prove that it is the product of the supreme architect, God. In *Rules for interpreting the words & language in Scripture* (1704) he details the necessary conditions for an adequate interpretation of the Bible and describes his own attempts to extract scientific information from it. In fact, Newton, driven by the belief that information about the evolution of the Universe is hidden behind biblical formulations, aimed to discover a biblical code. Nature was believed to be a cryptogram set by the Almighty, a riddle of the past and future events divinely preordained. [627] Like Faulhaber, he considered himself to be one of the few people gifted with the necessary intelligence to decipher the hidden meanings of the holy texts. [628] The eschatological analysis is far from meeting the conditions of scientific research, but the English physicist advanced his discoveries as if they were the result of studies based on material evidence:

> *Prop. 1. The 2300 prophetick days did not commence before the rise of the little horn of the He Goat.*
>
> *2. Those day [sic] did not commence a[f]ter the destruction of Jerusalem & ye Temple by the Romans A.[D.] 70.*
>
> *3. The time times & half a time did not commence before the year 800 in wch the Popes supremacy commenced*
>
> *4. They did not commence after the re[ig]ne of Gregory the 7th. 1084*
>
> *5. The 1290 days did not commence b[e]fore the year 842.*
>
> *6. They did not commence after the reigne of Pope Greg. 7th. 1084*
>
> *7. The diffence [sic] between the 1290 & 1335 days are a parts of the seven weeks.*
>
> *Therefore the 2300 years do not end before ye year 2132 nor after 2370. The time times & half time do n[o]t end before 2060 nor after [2344] The 1290 days do not begin [this should read: end] before 2090 nor after [2374].* [629]

A second reference about the year 2060 is in *An historical account of two*

notable corruptions of Scripture (1754), published 27 years after his death:

> *So then the time times & half a time are 42 months or 1260 days or three years & an half, recconing twelve months to a yeare & 30 days to a month as was done in the Calendar of the primitive year. And the days of short lived Beasts being put for the years of lived [sic for "long lived"] kingdoms, the period of 1260 days, if dated from the complete conquest of the three kings A.C. 800, will end A.C. 2060. It may end later, but I see no reason for its ending sooner.* [630]

In addition to 2060, Newton also speculated regarding the years 2034 and 2132. [631] In his eschatological scenario the last world empire from Daniel 2 would be the revived Roman Empire through the Holy Roman Empire. This was supposed to dominate the Christian world for a "week," a period of seven times 360 days, or 2,520 days in total. At the middle of this week, in the 1,260th day, the Antichrist would desecrate the Third Temple in Jerusalem. Following the pattern day/year, the revived Roman Empire had to exist 1,260 years beginning with 800 AD (the year when Charlemagne was crowned emperor). At the end of this period, in the year 2060 (800 + 1,260), the Antichrist would rise, closely followed by the coming of Christ. In reality, all the scenarios and prophecies related to the Holy Roman Empire collapsed after Napoleon Bonaparte forced its dissolution in 1806.

Apparently, Newton was an ordinary prophet. However, the purpose of his efforts was not to determine the moment of the end but to dismantle all the other apocalyptic prophecies:

> *This I mention not to assert when the time of the end shall be, but to put a stop to the rash conjectures of fancifull men who are frequently predicting the time of the end, & by doing so bring the sacred prophesies into discredit as often as their predictions fail. Christ comes as a thief in the night, & it is not for us to know the times & seasons wch God hath put into his own breast.* [632]

This is the time when the celestial events began to be the source of fewer and fewer astrological prophecies and of more and more scientific predictions. Newton was part of a new "species" of scholars, who used mathematics, physics or astronomy to determine future catastrophes and have treated the

end of the world as a scientific possibility. William Whiston, Newton's colleague at Cambridge, calculated that the world would end in 1736 due to a comet collision, [633] while the Swiss astronomer Jakob Bernoulli said this would happen in 1719. [634] Indeed, extraordinary natural phenomena always attract fatalistic feelings. But, far from being prophets of doom, such personalities established the bases of the scientific age in which terrifying natural phenomena are objects of study whose evolution and occurrence can be determined.

In the end, it can be said that astrology fell victim to its own success. The ultimate factor which led to the decline of astrology was astrology itself. The astrological outburst during the Reformation led to the improvement of the observation tools, which subsequently led to the formulation of new theories (such as heliocentrism) and the undermining of the old foundations of knowledge. The astrological principles did not fit anymore with the new observations. Celestial bodies were no longer analyzed through the magical doctrine of the zodiac or triplicities, but through mathematical and physical concepts such as speed, trajectory or force. The Enlightenment denied the existence of the spiritual realm; accordingly, astrology, alongside the other mystical domains, came to be groundless, thus leaving room for mathematics, astronomy, physics and other sciences to develop.

7. SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT DETERMINES ESCHATOLOGICAL TRENDS

7.1. THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL LANDMARK

7.1.1. The Reign of Terror and the rise of atheism

The French Revolution was a major event of the modern era, which marked the decline of monarchical power in Europe and set the bases for the future democratic systems. Between 1789 and 1799 France passed from absolute monarchy, based on the divine right of kings, to constitutional monarchy, where "the king reigns but does not rule," and then to republic. The absolute monarchy that ruled France for centuries collapsed in only three years. French society went through an epic transformation as the feudal, aristocratic and religious privileges evaporated under the assault of the revolutionary liberal policies, while the old ideas about hierarchy and tradition succumbed to the Enlightenment principles of citizenship and equal rights.

For centuries, French society was divided into three estates: the First Estate (the clergy), the Second Estate (the nobility) and the Third Estate (the common people). The relation between these three estates was highly disproportionate: the first two estates (the superior estates) were supported exclusively through the energy of the Third Estate (the inferior estate). While the Third Estate was lacerated by hunger and poverty, the Catholic Church was the largest landowner in France and Europe. The church was exempted from paying taxes to the government, but it was collecting its own taxes. It also kept the registers of births, deaths and marriages, and it was the only institution that offered hospitals and primary and secondary education.

The revolution started as a protest of the Third Estate against the Second Estate, the nobility, but it degenerated and turned extremely violent also against the First Estate, the church. In the autumn of 1789 the revolutionary government adopted a series of laws through which the monastic vows were abolished and all religious orders were dissolved. The monks and the nuns

were encouraged to return to their private life and get married. The Huguenots demanded the establishment of an anti-Catholic regime, while Enlightenment writings such as those of Voltaire denigrated Catholicism: “Our [religion] is without a doubt the most ridiculous, the most absurd, and the most blood-thirsty ever to infect the world.” [635] On July 12, 1790, the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy* was adopted, a law that transformed all clerics into public servants belonging to the state. The regulatory document aimed to remove the Church of France from under the authority of the Papacy and bring it to the side of the revolution. Nevertheless, only a fourth of the entire national clergy accepted the new regulation, while most Catholic leaders condemned the revolution and refused to support it. [636] For this reason, the revolutionary masses identified the church with a counter-revolutionary force, which must be eradicated together with the royalty: the decapitation of Louis XVI paralleled the decapitation of Christianity, while the replacement of the monarchy with the republic went hand in hand with the replacement of religion with the philosophy of reason.

In September 1792 the National Assembly legalized divorce, contrary to the Catholic doctrine. Concurrently, the state took control over the registers of births, deaths and marriages to the detriment of the church. In Paris, between the 2nd and 4th of September, three bishops and more than 200 priests were massacred by the enraged mob. The gold and the silver of the places of worship were confiscated for supporting the war efforts. [637] A law adopted on October 21, 1793, made all priests suspects of counter-revolutionary opinions, and anyone protecting them was punishable by death. On the 24th of October the Gregorian calendar – as an instrument decreed by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 – was replaced by the French Republican Calendar, which abolished the Sabbath, the days of the saints and other references to the church. Approximately 3,000 streets and places with religious names were renamed, the newborns were no longer baptized and they received only non-religious names, and the religious holidays were banned and replaced with holidays that celebrated the harvest or other secular symbols. [638]

On the line initiated by the philosopher René Descartes more than a century before, the French Revolution emancipated man from the revealed truth and placed him in the center of the Universe. Man, through his autonomous reason, was capable of making his own laws, independently from divinity.

The politician Pierre Gaspard Chaumette said that religion is a relic of superstitions which does not reflect the intellectual achievements of mankind, while Christianity is a bunch of ridiculous ideas that legitimate despotism. Together with the political journalist Jacques Hébert, Chaumette militated for the replacement of traditional religions with the Cult of Reason – a system of ideas that combined the glorification of science, atheism, humanism and patriotism. [639]

Social turmoil amplifies paranoia, so at the time of the revolution France was assaulted by real and imaginary conspiracies about internal and external enemies. Internally, the revolution was obstructed by the French nobility and the Catholic Church. Externally, the French First Republic (1792-1804) was engaged with the neighboring powers in the French Revolutionary Wars. The expansion of the civil war and the advance of the foreign armies inside the national territory caused a political crisis and amplified the rivalries between the Girondists and the more radical Jacobins. On September 6, 1793, the French government instituted the Committee of Public Safety, an institution meant to suppress the counter-revolutionary activities and to raise additional French military forces. And when the Committee came under the control of the lawyer Maximilien Robespierre “the Incorruptible” (dubbed this way due to his fanaticism), the Jacobins unleashed the Reign of Terror: a period of 11 months marked by extreme violence, religious eradication and collective executions. [640]

The Committee of Public Safety aimed to reform the nation by inducing a mixture of fanatical humanitarianism, social idealism and patriotism, so that the Catholic France could turn into a Republic of Virtue. In the eyes of the believers from everywhere revolutionary France was turning into pagan Rome and the Cult of Reason into the religion of the Antichrist. The priests were incarcerated and massacred, the churches were abolished, the ecclesiastical properties were confiscated and the objects of worship were destroyed. Between September and October 1793 the graves of all the kings of France at the Abbey of Saint-Denis were desecrated, the cathedral was vandalized and the human remains were thrown into mass graves. Placing crosses on graves was forbidden. Notre-Dame Cathedral and other important religious buildings were mutilated into temples of reason. In Nièvе the bells of the churches were melted to create weapons, while the priests were

lynched or forced to parade on a donkey to mimic Jesus. Schools and universities associated with the administration of the church were closed. [641] Under the threat of execution, incarceration or military recruitment, around 20,000 priests were forced to leave their jobs and between 6,000 and 9,000 were forced to marry. Until the end of the decade approximately 30,000 clerics left France or were guillotined. [642]

Robespierre, who condemned the Cult of Reason, sought to imprint a spiritual revival within the French nation according to his deistic beliefs. In 1794 the atheistic dissidence came to be perceived as counter-revolutionary, and thus atheistic extremists such as Hébert or moderates such as Danton were guillotined. The Incorruptible asked for a new status of religion and advised the National Convention to accept the existence of a Supreme Being. Accordingly, on May 7, 1794, the National Convention made a compromise between Catholicism and atheism and instituted the Cult of the Supreme Being as an official feature of the revolution. [643]

During crises mystics are among the few social categories that thrive and the French Revolution was no exception. A popular prophecy during the revolution was that of the Joachimite Jean-Baptist Ruery, a self-proclaimed descendant of King David who spoke, like many others, about the fall of emperors, catastrophes, the return of the Jews to Palestine and the inauguration of the Third Age. [644] The image of the general collapse was again accompanied by the hope of the saving establishment of the Millennium. For Suzanne Labrousse the revolution was the spiritual revival of France. Robespierre was God’s messenger and the Reign of Terror was a necessary purification of the nation through blood for the establishment of a new order. In 1792 Labrousse traveled to Vatican City to speak with the pope about the necessity of the revolution. But the pope was not impressed at all by her action; he imprisoned her in Castel Sant’Angelo until 1789, when the Roman Republic was established.

Even the end of Robespierre was largely due to mysticism. The members of the Convention feared that the Incorruptible might become a new dictator and sought means and motives to eliminate him. This happened when a conspiratorial connection between the lawyer and Catherine Théot, a 78-year-old prophetess, was fabricated. After a rigorous asceticism damaged her mind

and caused her hallucinations, in 1779 Théot declared herself to be the Virgin Mary, the New Eve and the Mother of God, destined to give birth to the future Messiah. Established on Contrescarpe Street, in 1794 Théot announced the coming of the Messiah, whose sign would be seen on the day of Pentecost, on the 8th of June. Given the fact that the Festival of the Supreme Being was organized on Pentecost, Robespierre was identified by Théot with the savior of the world prophesied by Ezekiel. But, ironically, the Théotists proved to be the weapon through which the Incorruptible was eliminated. Shortly after the festival, a report come from nowhere called for the arrest of Catherine Théot and her followers under the suspicion of counter-revolutionary activities. While the lawyer had nothing to do with this bunch of lunatics, in the meeting place of the group a compromising letter written and signed by Robespierre himself was "discovered." As a result, Robespierre was accused of favoring their actions, he was deposed, tried and guillotined on July 28, 1794. Instead, the Mother of God was tried and acquitted, but she died 33 days after Robespierre's execution. [645]

At the beginning of 1795 Christianity was allowed to be practiced again, but in strict limits. In 1799 priests were still incarcerated or deported, and the persecutions even intensified after the army led by General Louis Alexandre Berthier captured Rome and incarcerated Pope Pius VI. Finally, with Napoleon in full ascension, the years of negotiations between the government officials and Pope Pius VII led to the Concordat of 1801, an act that officially ended the period of dechristianization and established the rules of the relation between the Catholic Church and the French state.

7.1.2. Napoleon the Beast and the repatriation of the Jews

The convulsions of the French Revolution gave rise to a political figure that was easily classified as the Antichrist: Napoleon Bonaparte. From a young artillery officer in the French army, Napoleon became emperor over half of Europe in only seven years. During the French First Republic he led successful military campaigns against the First and the Second Coalition, he managed to obtain crucial positions in Italy and Egypt, gained influence and forged alliances for France. In 1799 he overthrew the Directory through a *coup d'état* and installed the Consulate with himself as the First Consul. Five years later his political ascension culminated with his coronation as emperor.

Napoleon was associated with the Antichrist for several reasons: he was seen as a progeny of the French Revolution, he tried to subdue Great Britain, he conquered most of Western Europe and created an empire that resembled the Roman Empire, he dethroned the pope and annexed the Papal States to his empire, and last but not least his military genius reminded Christians of the Messiah awaited by the Jews.

Napoleon's dream was to become as famous as the great leaders of the past. [646] In 1797 Napoleon decided that the naval power of France was not prepared to confront the Royal Navy in the English Channel. Instead, he led a military expedition in Egypt to undermine the access of the British to India and to satisfy his fantasy of walking in the footsteps of Alexander the Great. Through the Concordat of 1801 with Pius VII Napoleon aimed to win the pope to his side, but he also imitated Charlemagne in becoming the protector of the church. [647] In 1805 Napoleon created the Kingdom of Italy [648] and in Southern Germany he established the vassal states of Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg, Hesse-Darmstadt and Saxony, attached to France as the Confederation of the Rhine. [649] In August 1806 Napoleon forced the Habsburgs to abdicate, thus causing the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire and the end of a political power that lasted over eight centuries. In 1811, at the height of his power, Napoleon fulfilled his dream of equaling Julius Caesar: his domination expanded from the Atlantic Ocean to Belarus, and from Norway to Sicily.

During the French Revolution Napoleon resisted the atheists from the Directory, who demanded the march of the French army to Rome, the dethronement of the pope and the dissolution of the Papacy. Instead, Pope Pius VI asked for peace, which was granted to him at Tolentino in February 1797. However, in December, in a riot incited by the papal agents against the French and Italian revolutionaries, the brigadier-general Mathurin-Léonard Duphot was killed and thus the motive for a new invasion was created. General Berthier marched to Rome, entered without encountering resistance on February 10, 1798, proclaimed the Roman Republic and he made the Papal States satellites of the French Empire. [650] The pope was taken prisoner and was dragged across Europe until he perished in August 1799.

Due to the refusal of the Catholic Church to support the Continental System

established against England, Napoleon ordered the annexation of the Papal States to the French Empire in 1809. At the same time he issued two decrees through which he reproached the popes the ill use of the "Donation of Charlemagne," his "predecessor." Pius VII responded by excommunicating the emperor, but ended up being taken prisoner by the French officers. In 1810, after he divorced Joséphine de Beauharnais, Napoleon married Marie Louise of Austria. Thirteen cardinals were incarcerated for refusing to officiate the new marriage, which further deteriorated the relations with the Catholic Church. The pope remained imprisoned for another five years and did not return to Rome until 1814, when Napoleon was dethroned by the Congress of Vienna and the Papal States were reestablished. [651]

Previously, during the Reformation, Protestants believed that Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* delimited the end of the 1,260 years. Through a reversed calculation, the persecution of the saints was fitted between the years 330 and 1517. But the Papacy did not fall as the early Protestants expected, and thus the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon became new eschatological landmarks. With the Papacy in the role of the Beast, the Huguenots saw the incarceration of Pius VI in 1798 as the "deadly wound" from Revelation 13:3. The event, later confirmed by the annexation of the Papal States, marked the end of the 1,260 years of persecution started, through the new calculation, in 538 AD. Also, as at the time of the Reformation, it was believed that the Papacy must be destroyed before the establishment of the Millennium, and Napoleon's actions (as Luther's actions) created the impression that this would happen at the beginning of the 19th century.

The Continental System and the regional rivalry between England and France forced the English millenarists to have a different opinion. They associated the relation between the emperor of France and the Papacy with the succession of events between the Dragon, the Beast and the Whore of Babylon described in Revelation 13-18. Hester Lynch Piozzi was the first woman in England who wrote a history of the world, at the end of which she concluded that the First Consul of France was Apollyon, mentioned in Revelation 9:11: "They have over them as king the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek [tongue] he hath the name Apollyon." The name of the Antichrist became clear, and it was (according to the Corsican dialect) "N'Apollione," the "Destroyer," or the Beast which

hated and destroyed the Whore of Babylon (the Papacy). [652] Later, Matthew Habershon identified the reign of Napoleon with the fifth seal from Revelation 6:9-11, the fifth trumpet from Revelation 9:1-12, the fourth, the fifth and the sixth vial of wrath from Revelation 16:4-16 and the seventh head of the Beast from Revelation 13:1. [653]

Napoleon was seen as the Antichrist also due to the favors he granted to the Jews. In April 1799, when the French troops were besieging the city of Acre in Palestine, Napoleon prepared a proclamation through which he was about to declare the reestablishment of the Jewish state in the Palestinian area within Ottoman Syria. [654] The Corsican was confident that he would occupy Acre and in the next days he would enter Jerusalem, where he would read the declaration. But the siege was lost to the Ottomans, partly due to British intervention, and the plan to reestablish the Jewish state was abandoned. [655]

During the English Civil War, when people asked themselves how English society should be reorganized, the political philosophy advanced by Hobbes and Locke was suffocated by the religious alternatives. By contrast, the French revolutionaries removed religion from political affairs and organized their society according to the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his "social contract." Through the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in 1789 the French Revolution abolished the differential treatment of people, while freedom of belief was guaranteed as long as public order was not disturbed. At a time when various European countries restricted the rights of minorities, Napoleon's conquests spread the modernist ideas of revolutionary France: equality of citizens and the supremacy of law.

Napoleon Bonaparte was baptized Catholic. But, according to his secretary Louis Bourienne, he was interested in religion only for the political and economic benefits it could bring. Although he saw them as mere human creations and primitive remnants, the emperor used religions to keep the masses quiet and quickly gain their support. [656] The Corsican was not interested in the Jews for their religion, but for their money. In the conquered territories he emancipated the Jews from ghettos, expanded their rights of property, cult and career and allowed them to reassemble the Sanhedrin. [657] And in 1807 he made Judaism, alongside Catholicism and Protestantism, one of the official religions of France. [658]

Naturally, in those times any favor granted to the people of Judah – regardless of reasons – was a sort of capital sin. Tsar Alexander I strongly condemned the establishment of the Sanhedrin, while the Muscovite Synod of the Orthodox Church named Napoleon the "Antichrist" and the "enemy of God." Similarly, the Austrian consul Wenzel von Metternich expressed his concern that the Jews would look upon Napoleon as the Messiah. [659] And this Jewish prayer proves that Metternich was not far from the truth:

> *How fortunate we are, how good is our lot, that from Thy hand glory and beauty were poured out upon the head of a powerful man, full of vibrancy, Napoleon the Great, to sit on the Throne of France and Italy. Could another be found as worthy as Napoleon deserving of such honours and kingship, who shepherds his people with sincerity and with the understanding of his heart? Thou, God, hast wondrously bestowed Thy kindness upon him. As other Kings of the world approached to fight him, Thou didst protect him on the day of war, Thou didst save him from those who stood up against him, until he subdued them and they sought peace from him. With his kind spirit, he spoke words of peace to them.* *[660]*

Despite the success of the revolution, turning the Jews into citizens with equal rights was for many French people an outrageous perspective. The French magazine *Mercure de France* published an inflammatory anti-Semitic article saying that the Jews cannot have freedoms unless they convert to Catholicism. Even Napoleon's uncle, the cardinal Joseph Fesch, reproached the emperor: "Sire, so you wish the end of the world to come with your Laws to give the Jews the equality like the Catholics. Do you know that the Holy Scriptures predict that the end of the world will happen when the Jews will be recognized as a corporate nation." [661]

In the end, Napoleon proved to be a military genius who fulfilled his dream of being compared with the great political figures of history, but he was not the Antichrist. However, as in the case of other important leaders, posterity put him on the list of the precursors of the Antichrist. After the death of the emperor, the House of Bonaparte was haunted by the eschatological *stigmata* [662] because millenarists from England and America continued to depict a future French Antichrist, while the French Revolution was the subject of apocalyptic calculations for at least a century after its emergence. [663]

7.2. THE NEW ESCHATOLOGICAL TRENDS OF GREAT BRITAIN

7.2.1. From Hebraism to British Israelism

At the time of the Industrial Revolution, compared to the period of the English Civil War, Hebraism enjoyed popularity among all social classes and an incomparable greater political and financial support. In 1809 William Wilberforce and Charles Simeon founded the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, where anyone who believed that the Jewish issue would be solved through conversion could contribute. [664] For religious, humanitarian, philosophical or imperialistic reasons, the British adherents of Hebraism learned Hebrew, wrote novels about the Jewish commonwealth, organized services of transport and exploration to the Holy Land and supported the restoration of the Jews in public and private environments. Lord Lindsay wrote that "the land [of Palestine] still enjoys her Sabbaths, and only awaits the return of her banished children, and the application of industry commensurate with her agricultural capabilities, to burst once more into universal luxuriance – all that she ever was in the days of Solomon." [665] The same idea was expressed in 1841 by Charles Henry Churchill, a British resident in Damascus, through a letter addressed to the Jewish philanthropist Moses Montefiore: "I consider the object to be perfectly attainable. But, two things are indispensably necessary. Firstly that the Jews will themselves take up the matter universally and unanimously. Secondly, that the European Powers will aid them in their views." [666]

The reestablishment of the Jewish state was no longer only a religious matter, but also a political one. Anthony Ashley Cooper lobbied to Prime Minister Henry Palmerston and his successors in the government for England to protect the Jews already settled in Palestine. [667] In 1839 the Church of Scotland sent Andrew Bonar and Robert Murray M'Cheyne to write a detailed report about the condition of the Jews in Palestine. [668] Their work was published in Great Britain and it was followed by a memorandum of Cooper in the *London Times* magazine through which he demanded support for the restoration of the Jews. The *London Times* also reported that the British government took into consideration the Jewish restoration, while Cooper advanced his investigations regarding the Jewish opinion toward the

restoration, how fast they could leave for Palestine, if they were willing to pay for transportation and if they agreed to live under Turkish dominion, protected by European powers.

The British-Ottoman relations were excellent at the time. Mehmet Ali allied Egypt with France and in 1831 he rebelled against the sultan, invading Palestine and Syria. Ten years later the British allied with the Ottomans and helped them regain the lost territories. In 1840 Cooper thought that the sultan could return the favor by creating a Jewish state in Palestine. Accordingly, he convinced Prime Minister Palmerston to write to the British ambassador in Constantinople about this idea:

> *There exists at the present time among the Jews dispersed over Europe, a strong notion that the time is approaching when their nation is to return to Palestine. ... It would be of manifest importance to the Sultan to encourage the Jews to return and to settle in Palestine because the wealth which they would bring with them would increase the resources of the Sultan's dominions; and the Jewish people, if returning under the sanction and protection and at the invitation of the Sultan, would be a check upon any future evil designs of Mehmet Ali or his successors.* *[669]*

The interest of Great Britain in Palestine was expressed through charitable actions, colonial settlements and research campaigns. Over 1,000 conferences and researches of the Middle East were made in the 19th century, especially after the Crimean War. Supported by England, in 1853 Napoleon III forced the Ottomans to recognize the Catholic Church and the Western powers as the supreme Christian authority in the Holy Land, to the detriment of Russia and the Orthodox Church. As a result, in the second half of the century the British presence in the region intensified in order to protect the route to India and to ensure the stability of the Ottoman Empire against Russia's imperialistic tendencies. Thus, the idea that not long before seemed utopian became a more or less viable project and the Christian initiative for the restoration nourished the emerging Jewish movement of Zionism.

In *The Exodus of Israel* (1863) Thomas Rawson Birks, professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge, analyzed the problems of logistic, organization, breeding, diet and hygiene of the Israelites in their journey from Egypt to Palestine. Although the analysis of Birks had a historical character, it

demonstrated that many of the problems faced by the ancient Israelites were going to resurface in the case of a modern repatriation. [670] Likewise, George Eliot supported the restoration of the Jews and the establishment of a Jewish state in the novel *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Laurence Oliphant, a member of the Parliament and supporter of Ashley Cooper, published in 1880 *The Land of Gilead*, through which he asked the British Parliament to materially support the restoration of the Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe. But, according to Oliphant, in order to make room and to avoid conflicts, the Palestinian Arabs had to be relocated in reservations after the model of Native Americans. [671]

The Hebraism of the Industrial Revolution was ideologically different than the Hebraism of the English Civil War. At the end of the 19th century Hebraism generated British Israelism (or Anglo-Israelism or the Theology of the Two Kingdoms) – the belief that the Western European nations, especially those from the British Isles, are the direct descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. While the modern Jews are the direct descendants of the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the British and Northern European white nations are the descendants of the other tribes of the House of Israel.

According to the Bible, Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes, was renamed "Israel" (Genesis 32:28). While all the Jews are Israelites, not all the Israelites are Jews. The Jews (the Judeans) descend only from the two tribes separated from the other ten at the moment of the collapse of the United Monarchy in 930 BC. After the separation, during the time of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, the ten northern tribes formed the Kingdom of Israel (with the capital at Shechem), while the tribe of Judah (and Benjamin) formed the Kingdom of Judah (with the capital at Jerusalem). Hence, the supporters of British Israelism argued (rather speculated) that after the ten tribes of the Kingdom of Israel were deported by the Assyrians in the 8th century BC, these have never returned to their homeland, but have spread throughout the world and have formed the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic nations. [672]

British Israelism has never had a central organization or a unitary doctrine; it has been chaotically promoted by various groups and personalities. For example, it cannot be said for certain if the poet and mystic William Blake was an adherent of British Israelism, but in the poem *And did those feet in*

ancient time (1808) he expressly mentions the building of the New Jerusalem on England's land. British Israelism took a seemingly scientific form in 1840 with the publication of John Wilson's *Our Israelitish Origin* . [673] And in 188. Edward Hine left England for the United States, where he promoted the idea that Native Americans are the lost tribe of Manasseh, while the English are the lost tribe of Ephraim, thus supporting American exceptionalism. Hine was also the first who speculated that there is a connection between Germany and ancient Assyria. [674]

The followers of British Israelism were first of all nationalists; they were ideologically supporting the expansion of the British Empire as a divine duty. The English nation, as the new chosen nation, had to colonize and master the world not because it had the right to do that, but because this was its destiny. It was an ideology that sounded fine in the ears of many, but it had no historical or scientific ground. It was founded on legends, speculative associations and selective and distorted historical interpretations. All the so-called proofs are in fact superficial connections between the features of the Jewish people and the features of Nordic nations. One argument is, allegedly, the Semitic origin of the English language. [675] The sympathizers of British Israelism have excessively cited the 16th-century Reformist William Tyndale, who stated that "the properties of the Hebrew tongue agreeth a thousand times more with the English, than with the Latin. The manner of speaking is both one, so that in a thousand places thou needest not but to translate it into the English, word for word." [676] But Tyndale wrote this phrase in an entirely different context, and in no way did he have in mind the identification of the British people with the Israelites.

Another key point of British Israelism is the belief that the English people are similar in appearance with the Jews due to their common genetic heritage. [677] The Bible describes King David as being ruddy (1 Samuel 16:12; 17:42), which can be interpreted that he had either red hair or pink skin – both being Caucasian features. This apparent similarity was further developed in the idea that the British Royal Family directly descends from David. [678] The anti-Semitic group Christian Identity stated that, unlike the British and the Americans, which descend from the Ten Lost Tribes and are God's chosen nations, the Jews descend from Judah and are Satan's progenies. [679]

The real purpose of British Israelism was in fact to satisfy some people's desire of having a glorious past. British Israelism copies Jewish theology, only that, instead of Israelites, it supports the exceptionality of the British nations. British Israelism is nothing more than a nationalistic propagandistic doctrine. By conferring a majestic role in God's general plans to the British nations, it conveniently divides the world into two well-defined sides: saved and damned, saints and demons, and, ultimately, superiors and inferiors.

7.2.2. The Neo-Protestant betrayal: dispensationalism and the Rapture theory

At the beginning of the 19th century it was clear that the Catholic Church did not collapse as Protestants expected since the 16th century, the Papacy (or a certain pope) was not the Antichrist and the end of the world did not come. In other words, Protestant historicism – developed at the time of the Reformation – failed and another eschatological system had to be found. Accordingly, due to the pressure exercised upon religion by scientific development, amid a wave of spiritual occurrences and the development of British Israelism, a good part of the American and British Protestant organizations abandoned the tenets of the Reformation. Instead, they developed their own dogmas and adopted the dispensationalist eschatological point of view. Usually, these groups are generically called "Neo-Protestant," but, in a broader sense, Neo-Protestantism includes all the groups that came into existence in North America since the First Great Awakening.

Dispensationalism is a combination between Catholic futurism, Protestant historicism and Hebraism. The term "dispensationalism" is derived from the idea that the biblical history is better understood by dividing it into a series of "dispensations" – successive chronological covenants or historical periods (ages) within which God interacts with mankind in certain ways. There is no consensus among supporters regarding the exact number of dispensations; their number varies between three and eight. The minimal dispensationalist scenarios of three of four dispensations recognize only the major historical periods:

(1) The Covenant of the Law (from the Creation to Christ's birth);

(2) The Age of the Church (from the rise of the Church to its future Rapture);

(3) The Covenant of the Kingdom (from Revelation 20:4 to Revelation 22).

Instead, the maximal dispensationalist scenarios of seven or eight dispensations are linked to the inauguration of certain biblical covenants:

(1) The Edenic Covenant of Innocence (Genesis 1-3);

(2) The Antediluvian State of Consciousness (Genesis 3-8);

(3) The State of the Civil Government (Genesis 9-11);

(4) The State of Promise (Genesis 12 – Exodus 19);

(5) The Covenant of the Mosaic Law (from Exodus 20 to Christ's birth);

(6) The Covenant of the Christian Church (The Age of the Church until the Rapture);

(7) The Millennial Covenant (Revelation 20:4-6);

(8) The Eternal Covenant (Revelation 20-22).

The Scot Edward Irving, the forerunner of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, was of the opinion that the Church was far from being on the brink of an age of blessing; on the contrary, the world was getting worse and it was close to the dreadful judgment of God. [680] In 1826 Irving came into contact with Catholic futurism through the work *La Venida del Mesias en Gloria y Magestad* of the Spanish Jesuit Manuel Lacunza (Ben-Ezra). Irving was so pleased by Lacunza's theories that he learned Spanish in order to translate and to publish the work in English. [681] He added a dense preface in which he presented his own speculations about an imminent apostasy of Christianity, the subsequent restoration of the Jews, a charismatic outpouring and ultimately Parousia. [682]

In 1826 Henry Drummond, impressed by Irving's prophetic zeal, gathered a group of 20 guests, clergymen and laymen to discuss prophetic matters at his private mansion in Albury Park. Repeated for another four years, the Albury

conferences put the bases of the future doctrine of dispensationalism. In 1829 Drummond summarized the conclusions agreed upon by all the participants:

(1) The end will not come imperceptibly, but in a cataclysmic manner;

(2) The Church would be destroyed in the same manner the Jewish nation was destroyed;

(3) The Jews would be restored in Palestine during the Last Judgment;

(4) The Judgment would mainly befall Christianity;

(5) After the Judgment the Millennium would begin;

(6) The Second Coming would happen before the establishment of the Millennium;

(7) The 1,260 years from Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 must be measured from the reign of Justinian until the French Revolution. The vials of wrath from Revelation 16 were poured at that moment and Parousia was imminent. [683]

Initially, Irving believed that that the apostolic spiritual gifts would be restored toward the end of time through the increased activity of the Holy Spirit in the material world. But in May 1828, while he was making a preaching tour in Scotland, A. J. Scott convinced Irving that the spiritual gifts have never been withdrawn from among mankind, but they are as present as in the time of the apostles. Coincidentally, in the same period rumors began to circulate about strange events taking place in Southern Scotland: parishioners were experiencing shakings, faintings and spasms, followed by extreme piety, miraculous healings, speaking in tongues ("glossolalia"), automatic writing ("xenoglossia" – writing in strange characters with an amazing speed in state of trance) and all sort of prophecies. The religious leaders personally investigated these cases. And while Edward Irving and Henry Drummond concluded that these events were manifestations of the Holy Spirit, John Nelson Darby and Benjamin Newton assigned them to demonic powers. [684]

Darby was responsible for the most profound systematization of the

dispensationalist doctrine. In 1827 he left the Church of Ireland to form the Plymouth Brethren – a copy of John Wesley's Methodism [685] based on the missionary work of lay evangelists. Irving did the same thing, leaving the Church of Scotland to form the Catholic Apostolic Church in 1832. Both Irving and Darby believed in progressive revelation (the idea that the work of the Holy Spirit would be increasingly active as the end approaches), believed that their new theological systems were part of this progressive revelation and both premised that the imminent return of Christ had two stages.

In the first stage Christ would take his Bride (the Church) to Heaven in a secret and spontaneous manner, before the rise of the Antichrist and the beginning of the great tribulation. This image was based on 1 Thessalonians 4:17: "then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." In other words, Christians would be taken (abducted) from the earth and they would meet the Son of God on the clouds of heaven (literally, in the air flying). This process was called "Rapture." After the Rapture the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world would diminish, thus giving the Antichrist the opportunity to rise and to begin the seven-year period of the great tribulation.

The second stage of Parousia would start after the seven years of tribulation, when Christ would descend from heaven (clouds) on the earth and he would judge the world.

In 1831 Darby presented his dispensationalism at the Powerscourt Conferences in Dublin, where he insisted on the grammatical, historical and literal interpretation of the Bible. His point of view relied on the literal experiences had by the people of Israel and the fact that the prophecies of the Old Testament have the meaning of exactly what they affirm: the prophetic days mean literal days, Israel means Jews, the prophetic numbers refer to exact periods of time, and even the symbols refer to persons or events identifiable from a scientific and historical point of view. The nation of Israel (not necessarily the State of Israel) distinguishes itself from the Christian Church, and God did not yet fulfill the promises regarding the former. These promises include the future materialization of the prophecies of the Old Testament, when Christ would reign over the world from Jerusalem for 1,000 years alongside the Israelites. And, while God's methodologies may change,

his intention to bless Israel as he promised to Abraham would never be forgotten.

In Darby's opinion, the Church is a parenthesis in the prophetic fulfillment between the weeks 69 and 70 of Daniel. Due to its union with Christ, the Church has nothing to do with the earthly people of Israel. But the Church, as a covenant (dispensation), has been so ruined by the corrupt system of the clergy that it became quite the opposite of the purpose it had been built for. It failed and consequently it has to suffer God's judgment, as it happened in the past with the other covenants. In this context, Darby's hope for the Church was, as in the case of Israel, a part of it to be saved. Any attempt to renovate the Church is doomed to failure because God does not want to save it. Darby, therefore, condemned the apostasy of all existing churches and recommended that the true believers should gather in the name of Christ – an image the Plymouth Brethren fully assumed. [686]

The Church, according to Darby, began to exist when Stephen was stoned (Acts 7), Saul was saved (Acts 9), or Paul made the first missionary journey (Acts 13). In one of these moments the Church distinguished itself from Israel. But the Church was not built on a Jewish model, on branches, and it was never revealed in the Old Testament. Israel was an earthly kingdom with earthly promises and blessings. Christ came to fulfill the promises made by God to the earthly Israelite kingdom, but he was rejected. When this happened, God stopped the prophetic clock and established the Church. Until the Rapture of the Church this prophetic clock is suspended, after which God would resume his purposes for his earthly people, Israel. The Israelites have an earthly material calling, while Christians have a spiritual heavenly calling. So, the establishment of the Kingdom of God is the hope of Israel, which would govern the world, would rebuild the Temple, would reinstate the sacrifices, would recognize Jesus as the Messiah and nations would accept Israel as the people of God. [687]

The literal hermeneutics came to be one of the basic features of dispensationalism, but this meant that Revelation describes only future events, and not the history of Christianity from the beginnings until the return of Christ. In other words, Darby rejected Protestant historicism and adopted Catholic futurism alongside the Rapture theory.

Dispensationalism was largely ignored in Great Britain, but it received a favorable reception in the United States, especially among the Baptists and the Presbyterians. It was introduced in North America by James Inglis, who in 1866 organized meetings with a small but influential number of American evangelists. Dispensationalism was seriously boosted after Dwight Moody became an adherent in 1872. Moody offered it institutional stability through the Moody Church and Moody Bible Institute, while the *Scofield Reference Bible* , conceived by Cyrus Scofield and his associates, introduced the new eschatological school to a large audience. [688]

Currently, dispensationalists are accused of embracing "Judeophilia" – a term which designates the support for the State of Israel, the rejection of anti-Semitism and the practice of Jewish rituals and holidays. Dispensationalism focuses on the original recipients of the divine prophecies, thus making a clear distinction between Israel and the Church. Israel is an ethnic nation composed of Israelites, which began with Abraham and has continued to exist until the present day. According to Scofield and Harry Ironside, the Church consists of all the individuals saved within the dispensation (covenant) of Jesus Christ, which began with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles (Acts 2) and it would last until the Rapture of the Church. [689] The distinction between Israel and the Church is not mutually exclusive, because there is an acknowledged superposition between the two in the first Christian Jews (Peter and Paul for example), who had faith in Christ. Similarly, at the time of the Antichrist (who would also be a Jew) [690] Israel would embrace Jesus as the Messiah right before his Second Coming. [691] Christians should not rely on the promises of the earthly governments or the successes of this world, because the Millennium is at the door. Instead, they should separate themselves from this world because, as the end gets closer, it increasingly decays.

7.2.3. The rise of pyramidology

From a historical point of view, the megastructures created by ancient civilizations were a declaration of power and a symbol of the godlike status of the leaders. Height signals dominance. By making the subjects feel small and insignificant, large buildings had the purpose of maintaining order and control. But there is a pattern in the ancient ruins: from Egypt, Mesopotamia,

Indonesia to Central America, man's first megastructures are pyramidal in shape. The tallest things on Earth, the mountains, are natural pyramids; their shape is dictated by the forces of gravity and friction. Hence, ancient people were inspired by nature's lesson: if you want to defy gravity and build tall, but you have only rudimentary materials and little expertise, then you have to build mountain-like structures. This is how civilizations, with no direct contact, separated by oceans, continents and sometimes thousands of years, created similar megastructures. Nevertheless, some people have found this explanation unsatisfactory and refused to accept that the ancient megastructures were nothing more than a colossal waste of resources. Instead, they have preferred to think that there is something more, suprarational or supernatural, related to their shape and their purpose.

Pyramidology is a term used, sometimes flouting, to refer to different pseudo-scientific speculations regarding the manner in which the pyramids of Giza were built, the purpose for which they were built, the messages and information these structures contain, and the connection between the geometrical pyramidal structure in general and the mechanics of the Universe. Currently, pyramidology is divided into three branches:

(1) Pseudoarchaeological – comprises theories which deny the fact that the pyramids were built by the Egyptians to serve only as tombs for pharaohs; instead, the pyramids were built by groups other than the Egyptians (Jews, Atlanteans or aliens) using unknown and advanced technologies;

(2) Numerological – comprises theories which affirm that the dimensions of the Great Pyramid of Giza contain coded messages of scientific or prophetic nature;

(3) Pyramidal power – comprises ideas about how pyramidal geometrical figures influence unknown energies of the Universe.

Pyramidology came into being in the 17th century, when the English exegetes strove to unlock the architectural secrets of the Holy Temple and other important biblical edifices. John Greaves, a professor of astronomy, was the initiator of "metrological pyramidology." In *Pyramidographia, or a description of the pyramids in Ægypt* (1646) he speculated that the Great Pyramid of Giza was built using the unit of measurement of the geometrical

cubit, which he named the “Memphis cubit.”

Isaac Newton discussed Greaves’s measurements in *A dissertation upon the sacred cubit of the Jews* and he made a connection between the Memphis cubit and the hypothetical sacred cubit of the Hebrews mentioned in the Bible. The cubit was the unit of measurement used in the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon. In all cases, the measurements were made according to God’s command. In 1737, ten years after Newton’s death, the pyramidological studies of Greaves and Newton were united and published in two volumes by the English historian Thomas Birch. [692]

Napoleon Bonaparte’s expeditions in Egypt brought in Europe a new wave of information regarding Egyptian culture. This aspect revived the research of the sacred architecture and inflamed the imagination of the followers of British Israelism. For more than 200 years the Hebraists exaggerated the features of the Israelites by portraying them as the most gifted people from a genetic and intellectual point of view. Furthermore, in the biblical Book of Exodus the Israelite nation is kept in slavery by the Egyptians and used to build various edifices (Exodus 1). Hence, Newton’s inopportune connection between the biblical cubit and pyramidal cubit allowed the followers of British Israelism to make a direct connection between the magnificent construction of the Great Pyramid and the magnificent people of Israel. In 1859 John Taylor, an English essayist who never visited the Great Pyramid, stated that the Great Pyramid was built not by the Egyptians, but by the Jews, who acted according to divine commandments. Alongside Noah’s Ark or the Temple of Solomon, the structure is part of the series of the magnificent Israelite constructions. And the Bible, apparently, even mentions it: [693]

> *In that day shall there be an altar to Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to Jehovah. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto Jehovah of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they shall cry unto Jehovah because of oppressors, and he will send them a saviour, and a defender, and he will deliver them (Isaiah 19:19-20). [694]*

In practice, the false relation between the Bible and the Great Pyramid transformed this monument into a puzzle of stone that has been patiently

waiting for millennia for its secrets to be unfolded. [695] But, since there were no indications about how the numerical values of the pyramid should be calculated or interpreted, any number could have been calculated to match any possible aspect. As a result, many important biblical events have been "miraculously" found in the structure of the Great Pyramid through this process of divination. For example, Taylor believed that the unit of measurement used at the building the Great Pyramid was a quarter of the sacred cubit, previously postulated by Newton. Twenty-five of these pyramidal inches form a pyramidal cubit, while ten million pyramidal cubits approximate Earth's radius on its polar axis. This and a series of similar calculations were for Taylor proofs that the Great Pyramid was built as a model of Earth's dimensions and proportions.

In 1865 the Scot Robert Menzies believed that the system of passages from within the Great Pyramid was constructed according to a chronological scale in which a geometrical inch corresponds to a calendrical year. When these passages are properly measured and the symbolism is correctly interpreted, important dates of Earth's past and future are revealed. [696]

Charles Piazzi Smyth, astronomer at the University of Edinburgh, was captivated by pyramidology and Taylor's theories. Piazzi Smyth embarked alone on an expedition to Egypt to verify if the Hyksos who built the Great Pyramid were, as Taylor suggested, the Israelites commanded by Melchizedek, the King of Salem from Genesis 14. [697] He took with him equipment to measure on the spot every aspect of the Great Pyramid: from the longitude and the latitude, the dimensions of the stones, the precise angles of the sections to the temperature of the inner chambers. The problem was that the Scottish astronomer did not go to Egypt to verify a theory from the position of an impartial observer, but to confirm his own misconceptions. He derived a complex set of numerical interrelations between aspects such as the number of stones used in the construction of the inner chambers, the volume and the shape of the stone of the coffer found in the king's chamber, the number of sides and angles of the pyramid and the cycles of masonry between various chambers. He speculated that the architects of the pyramid used the units of measurement of the pyramidal inch (equivalent to 1.001 British inches), the pyramidal pint (0.47 l) and the sacred cubit (45 cm) – all of divine origin. Starting from Taylor's premise that the Great Pyramid is a

symbol of Earth, Piazzi Smyth's works are crammed with peddling calculations between the dimensions of the two objects. For example, the number of inches of the perimeter of the base seems be equal to the number of days of a year multiplied with 1,000; the height of the Great Pyramid multiplied with one billion seems to be equal to the distance from Earth to the Sun; or the "widespread" presence of the number seven or of the numbers divisible to seven seem to indicate that the architects had knowledge about the Hebrew sabbatical week. [698] These observations confirmed the image of the pyramid as a deposit of encoded prophecies and led Piazzi Smyth to speculate that the end of the world would take place in 1881 or 1882. [699]

At a time when religion was cracking under the pressure of the scientific development, pyramidology made a good team with the occult. Helena Blavatsky, one of the leaders of theosophy and an early supporter of pyramidology, stated that the interior of the Great Pyramid had been used for sacred rituals in connection with the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* . The structure, allegedly, shelters great spiritual mysteries, which are known only by few initiates. [700]

Piazzi Smyth's theories were adopted by Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, which later became the core of Jehovah's Witnesses. In *The divine plan of the ages* (1886) Russell stated that the Great Pyramid contains "the plan of God for the world's salvation." [701] He, however, denounced the version of pyramidology influenced by British Israelism and preferred the dispensationalist theories of Joseph Seiss. [702] With an entire chapter dedicated to the Great Pyramid in *Thy Kingdom Come* (1890), Russell linked the structure of the pyramid to the millennial week and the prophetic speculations of his associate Nelson Barbour:

> *The Great Pyramid, however, proves to be a storehouse of important truth – scientific, historic and prophetic – and its testimony found to be in perfect accord with the Bible, expressing the prominent features of its truths in beautiful and fitting symbols. It is by no means an addition to the written revelation; that revelation is complete and perfect, and needs no addition. But it is a strong corroborative witness to God's plan; and few students can carefully examine it, marking the harmony of its testimony with that of the written Word, without feeling impressed that*

its construction was planned and directed by the same divine wisdom, and that it is a pillar of witness referred to by the prophet [Isaiah 19:19-20]. [703]

Russell submitted his ideas to Piazzi Smyth's analysis and received the approval of the latter. But the prophetic failures based on pyramidology led the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses to shamelessly alter the text of his works. In the 1891-1904 editions of the work Russell makes the following calculations:

So, then, if we measure backward down the "First Ascending Passage" to its junction with the "Entrance Passage," we shall have a fixed date to mark upon the downward passage. This measure is 1542 inches, and indicates the year B.C. 1542, as the date at that point. Then measuring down the "Entrance Passage" from that point, to find the distance to the entrance of the "Pit," representing the great trouble and destruction with which this age is to close, when evil will be overthrown from power, we find it to be 3416 inches, symbolizing 3416 years from the above date, B.C. 1542. This calculation shows A.D. 1874 as marking the beginning of the period of trouble; for 1542 years B.C. plus 1874 years A.D. equals 3416 years. Thus the Pyramid witnesses that the close of 1874 was the chronological beginning of the time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation – no, nor ever shall be afterward. [704]

The editions following 1904 have the year 1874 changed with the year 1915: "we find it to be 3457 inches, symbolizing 3457 years from the above date, B.C. 1542. This calculation shows A.D. 1915 as marking the beginning of the period of trouble; for 1542 years B.C. plus 1915 years equals 3457 years." [705]

In 1928 Joseph Rutherford, Russell's successor at the leadership of Jehovah's Witnesses, condemned pyramidology as being not only unscriptural, but also inspired by the devil with the purpose of deceiving people in the final days. [706]

In 1880 the English Egyptologist William Flinders Petrie, initially a supporter, went to Egypt and he discovered that many of the previous measurements were erroneous; the Great Pyramid was actually a few meters

smaller than it had been previously thought. [707] This thing demolished the initial pyramidological theories:

> *The theories as to the size of the pyramid are thus proved entirely impossible ... The fantastic theories, however, are still poured out, and the theorists still assert that the facts correspond to their requirements. It is useless to state the real truth of the matter, as it has no effect on those who are subject to this type of hallucination. [708]*

And Flinders Petrie was right. Pyramidology hijacked and insulted Egypt's history, but this, of course, did not stop the followers of British Israelism from further abusing it. In *The Great Pyramid: Its Builder & Its Prophecy* (1905) Colonel Garner attempted to prove that the inner chambers of the Great Pyramid contain prophetic dates regarding the fate of the British, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon nations. David Davidson and Herbert Aldersmith published in 1928 *The Great Pyramid, its divine message* and launched the idea that Britain's chronology (including future events) is encoded in the Great Pyramid. Or *The Symbolic Prophecy of the Great Pyramid* (1936) of Henry Spencer Louis defies common sense: "in adopting such an inch [the Egyptians] realized that the Anglo-Saxon races would be the first to recognize the unit of measurement and therefore look upon the messages concealed in the Great Pyramid as intended for them principally." [709]

The relation between pyramidology and British Israelism vanished in the 1950s, when the alien and the New Age phenomena gained momentum. In 1956 Leonard Cottrell, after he analyzed Piazzi Smyth's theories, coined the term "pyramidiot" in order to designate all those who still believe in pyramidology. [710] And yet, pyramidology did not die, it only transformed, being absorbed by more popular trends that comprise the ancient monumental structures from everywhere (pre-Columbian, European, Egyptian and so forth). In the new context the encoded prophecies of the Great Pyramid were no longer dictated by God, but by aliens or New Age masters. This facelift allowed pyramidology to thrive and, according to Barbara Mertz, to become once again an inexhaustible source of fantasy for the twisted minds of the modern mystics:

> *Even in modern times, when people, one would think, should know better, the Great Pyramid of Giza has proved a fertile field for fantasy.*

The people who do not know better are the pyramid mystics, who believe that the Great Pyramid is a gigantic prophecy in stone, built by a group of ancient adepts in magic. Egyptologists sometimes uncharitably refer to this group as "pyramidiots," but the school continues to flourish despite scholarly anathemas. [711]

7.3. IDEALISM, PRETERISM AND ESCHATOLOGICAL REEVALUATION

In the 19th century the development of biology, physics or chemistry threw a natural light upon many events considered supernatural, while archaeological and historical discoveries contradicted the biblical accounts. The religious paradigm became insufficient in explaining the natural order. Millenary beliefs about the Creation and the position of man in nature succumbed before the evolution of the species and the size of the Universe. At this time the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche enunciated the famous expression "God is dead!" [712] not because God as a being died, but to emphasize that the idea of divinity was fading. Morality apparently divorced religion and mankind ceased to wait for divine help and took its fate into its own hands.

Religious groups restructured and reinterpreted their doctrines for a better relation with modern thinking and ultimately to ensure their survival. From an eschatological point of view, an adequate explanation had to be found for the fact that the apocalyptic prophecies, which were enunciated more than 1,800 years in the past, were still unfulfilled. The need for answers drove the scholars to reread the original texts and to reanalyze the early doctrines. It was quickly concluded that the ecumenical councils, which have dictated how the Bible should be interpreted, were formed of fallible people driven by long "expired" conceptions. Accordingly, new systems of ideas, such as dispensationalism, were conceived or marginal religious structures such as preterism and idealism were rediscussed.

Eschatological idealism originates in the amillenarism developed by Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria and Augustine. But there are major differences between Augustine's allegorical approach of Revelation and the idealism of the Industrial Era. The later was in fact an eschatological

adaptation of German philosophical idealism. Thinkers such as Johann Fichte, Georg W. Hegel or Arthur Schopenhauer stated that reality is only a mental, immaterial construct. Eschatological idealism was not far from this position: [713]the imagery of the Book of Revelation is not physical because it is placed neither in the past nor in the present and nor in the future; it is a symbolic exposition of certain principles through which God acts in the world. The apocalyptic descriptions are relevant to all people, regardless of time and place. They depict the continuous spiritual battle between good and evil, which is further reflected at material level in the scientific acquisitions and their impact – positive or negative – in the transformation of mankind. The beast from the sea may represent the idea of imperialism, the inevitable globalization as a result of progress or the primary desire of man to subdue other people. The beast from the earth may represent pagan religions, atheism, materialism, corruption and moral decadence, all in contrast to Christianity. The Whore of Babylon may be a symbol for the compromised church or the corruption of the world in general. Each seal, trumpet or vial represents natural disasters, wars and catastrophes that reveal God's discontent regarding the sinful humanity. The battles from Revelation can be seen as symbols for the continuous battle between the forces of light and darkness, of the moral against the immoral, of knowledge against ignorance, of evolution against stagnation, of the old against the new or of faith against faithlessness. Parousia marks the achievement of a human evolutionary stage in which good and morality triumph over evil and immorality and become inherent to human nature.

Idealism had the merit of achieving something that seemed impossible from a theological point of view: it created a framework within which the global determinism cohabits with the individual free will. Regardless of the actions of the human individual being, humanity as a group is destined to evolve through experimentation, mistakes, sacrifices and stages that cannot be eluded. From fire to electricity, from feudalism to monarchy and then to republic, from tribes to nations and ultimately to one nation, or from man to machine – the pattern of evolution manifests itself in all fields of knowledge. So, idealism avoids the problem of harmonization between the biblical texts and history by depicting the Book of Revelation as a symbolic map of the spiritual and intellectual path of mankind. The Kingdom of God is not a political, physical and global phenomenon instantly established, but a symbol

for a certain level of historical progress. [714]

Idealism attempted to reconcile science and religion by abstracting eschatology and integrating scientific progress in a universal religious scheme. This had to relieve, at least theoretically, Christian eschatology from the threat of future discoveries. Nevertheless, idealism was little accepted because it undermines the importance of the institution of the church and it restrains the presence of God in the world. Idealism was also contested because history became the subject of the secular-analytical research. Industrial society was demanding proved facts, not unverifiable fictions, historical certitudes and not religious interpretations.

Preterism came to satisfy scientific rigors through its practical nature. Preterism (Latin: *praeter* , *praeteritus* – "gone," "past"), also known as the "realized eschatology," is the opposite of futurism. While futurism places the prophecies of the New Testament in the future of mankind, preterism places them in the past.

A large part of the prophecies of Christ and of the apostles are enunciated as if they refer to their near future. Jesus says in Matthew 16:28 that the end must come before the death of the last apostle, John: "there are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." In Matthew 10:23 he says: "But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come." The same idea is expressed in Matthew 24:34: "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." Paul's epistles seem to say that Jesus had to return in the middle of the 1st century: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven ... and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). This idea can also be found in Luke 9:27; 21:32; Mark 9:1 and even Revelation 1:7: "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him."

These texts seem to indicate that the first generation of Christians expected the end of the world to take place during their lifetime. But this thing obviously did not happen, which means that Jesus and the apostles were

wrong or they lied. [715] This conclusion, however, is unacceptable from a Christian point of view because it undermines the foundations of Christianity: the inerrancy of the Bible (without error) and the belief that Jesus Christ is God.

Preterism solves the problem of these prophetic texts by depicting Revelation not as a prophetic book, but rather as a historical one. Eusebius was one of the first and few early theologians who said that Revelation symbolically describes political and religious events which took place in the 1st century. Later, at the time of the Counter-Reformation, when the Catholic scholars sought theories capable of refuting Protestant historicism, the Jesuit Luis del Alcázar supported preterism in *Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apocalypsi* (1614) and *In eas Veteris Testamenti partes quas respicit Apocalypsis* (1631). Although in the end futurism prevailed, preterism has continued to subsist in the Catholic environment. [716]

The first Protestant who adopted the preterist point of view was the Dutch Hugo Grotius in *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (1644). [717] Thomas Hayne supported preterism in *Christs Kingdome on Earth, opened according to the Scripture* (1645) and Joseph Hall did the same in *The Revelation unrevealed* (1650). And in 1730 the Swiss Protestant Firmin Abauzit published *Essai sur l'Apocalypse* , one of the most complete expositions of preterism. [718]

Unlike historicism, which says that the Whore of Babylon is Rome and the Papacy, preterism identifies it with Jerusalem, destroyed by God in the year 70 due to its uncleanness. The apocalyptic Babylon is a symbol that designates the city of Jerusalem in particular and the Jewish people in general, which failed in their purpose to become the spiritual core of the world.

In the Old Testament the Israelite people repeatedly killed the saints and the prophets sent by God. As John describes Babylon the Great in Revelation, the unfaithful Israel and the city of Jerusalem are repeatedly described as a whore, a mother of whoredom or an infidel wife (Jeremiah 2:2; 2:20; 3:1-14, 20; Hosea 1:2; Ezekiel 6:9; 16:1-43; 23 or Isaiah 50:1; 54:5; 1:21).

In the New Testament Christ assigns the guilt for killing the prophets and

saints to the Pharisees of Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her!” (Matthew 23:34-37). There is an obvious similarity between the incrimination of Jerusalem from Matthew 23:34-37 and Luke 11:47-51 on the one hand, and Babylon the Great from Revelation 17:6 and 18:20-24 on the other hand. In Jeremiah 13 the tribe of Judah is warned that due to its whoredom the cups of all men will be filled with wine, they will be drunk and the nation will be destroyed, while Jesus warns that Jerusalem will be invaded and destroyed (Luke 21:20-22); the fulfillment of these warnings seems to be described in Revelation 17-18.

While the apocalyptic Babylon is a metaphor for the city of Jerusalem, the Beast (the Antichrist), the Dragon and the False Prophet from Revelation 13 are symbols for Rome (or the Roman emperor), the Roman Empire and the pagan Roman religion. [719] The Whore of Babylon “sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast [having seven heads]” refers to the relation between Rome and the apostate Jerusalem. Rome was known in Antiquity as the city of seven hills (Revelation 17:9), but the city of Jerusalem was also built on seven hills. [720] The gospels, Revelation and especially the Acts of the Apostles describe how the Jews used the Romans to crucify Jesus, to persecute the early Christians and to suppress the new religion (Matthew 23:27; Luke 23:2; John 19:15; Acts 4:26-28; 7:57-60; 12:1-3; 16:20; 17:7; 18:12; 21:11; 24:1-9; 25:1-2; Revelation 17:6; 18:20, 24 or 16:6). Even Christ’s crucifixion seems mentioned in Revelation 11:8: “And their dead bodies [lie] in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” The alliance between the Jews and the Romans is also confirmed by the chronicler Flavius Josephus: “And it seems to me to be necessary here to give an account of all the honors that the Romans and their emperor paid to our nation, and of the leagues of mutual assistance they have made with it ... and that they have been abundantly satisfied of our courage and fidelity.” [721]

Later, the Beast (Rome) turned against the Whore of Babylon (Jerusalem) and destroyed it (Revelation 17:16). The First Jewish-Roman War, which took place between 66 and 73 AD, started when the Jews in Caesarea rioted against Rome’s dominion. This war represents the seven years of tribulation from Daniel 9:27. In the middle of the period of seven years, in the year 70, the 42 months or the 1,260 days or the three and a half years from Revelation

11:2 began, when the Temple was tread under foot by nations. Between the years 70 and 73 the Neronian persecution, the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, the dissolution of the State of Israel and the death of hundreds of thousands of Jews took place. [722]

In conclusion, preterism states that the texts of the New Testament were prophetic at the moment when they were written. But in the 2nd century they turned into historical texts. The “last days” do not refer to the last days of the planet Earth or the last days of mankind, but to the last days of the Mosaic Covenant. The New Jerusalem is the Church, now and forever, which is destined to Christianize the world. Classic preterism [723] contains a minimum amount of futurism, necessary to explain the presence of Christ’s enemies in the actual world. Because evil still exerts its influence upon the world, the end of the world cannot be identified with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, and consequently it must take place in the future. Christians live in the apocalyptic time, being temporally placed between Parousia and the total renovation of the world mentioned in Revelation 21. [724] The end of the world is not a predetermined event because its fulfillment depends on improving the human condition through knowledge. The actual world lives in Augustine’s Millennium, a symbol of the Church, while the New Testament describes many “comings” of Christ, not just two (Acts 9:1-30; Revelation 1:10-19). So, there will be a future coming of Christ (which is not the Second Coming, but one of his many comings), the resurrection of the dead and the Judgment of God. But there will be no Millennium, battle of Armageddon or the Antichrist. Christ will come on Earth every time humanity reaches certain levels of understanding, until mankind, with his help, will defeat the ultimate enemy: physical death (1 Corinthians 15:20-24).

None of the eschatological schools can explain all the prophecies. Hence, the line between symbolic and literal, reality and fantasy or past and present is traced by each interpreter according to his own interests and conceptions.

In the first case, Protestant-historicist, the followers have the tendency to behave like hypochondriacs and relate the “symptoms” described in Revelation with their own times. This position offers an infinite interpretive framework and endless speculations. The historicist scheme of the 19th century includes the French Revolution, while in the 20th century the

prophecies “spoke” about the atomic bomb, world wars and communism. Moreover, historicism has the inconvenience of focusing on the Catholic Church and almost not at all on the Eastern Orthodox Church, which means that the image of Revelation as a historical narration of the entire Church fails.

The second, idealism, allows a too wide variety of interpretations. The followers of idealism allow the political and sociocultural factors of their own times to influence the interpretations, rather than to search for the author’s intentions. [725] The figures and events of Revelation can be attached to any time and place, but represent only qualities and trends. So, a prophecy can mean anything or nothing, depending on the scholar. [726] Moreover, Revelation is part of the genre of apocalyptic documents that describe actual historical events. The classic example is the Book of Daniel, which prophesied about the fate of the four world empires. The absolute symbolism of eschatological idealism is contradicted by Revelation 1:1 and 4:1, where John declares that he describes specific future things. If there would not be an actual timeline according to real historical events, then these statements would be superfluous and the section dedicated to the seven churches (Revelation 2-3) would also be outside history.

In the third case, of preterism, history and prophecy go hand in hand only up to a certain point. Rome was not overthrown by God, the saints continued to be persecuted and the decisive victory depicted in the last chapters of Revelation have not yet happened. It is hard to believe that John imagined something other than the complete overthrow of Satan, the final destruction of evil and the eternal reign of God. Otherwise it would mean that John wrongly presented his message and it is so ambiguous that it is virtually useless. In addition, a good part of Revelation seems to refer to a distant time from the moment of its writing. The events described by John in Revelation 4-19 and by Jesus on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 differ in many ways from the fall of Jerusalem. This means that preterism, like the other schools of eschatological interpretation, also uses the allegorical interpretation every time a connection has to be made between the Bible and history.

And the fourth, futurism, conveniently throws the prophetic frame into an

obscure, undefined and uncontrollable future, which can be indefinitely extended. This allows futurists to continuously apply the prophetic symbols to current events. Moreover, futurism cannot explain biblical prophecies on which preterism relies, while ignoring at least 2,000 years of history and placing the apocalyptic prophecies in a future period of three and a half years does not make any sense.

Idealism and preterism aimed to put an end to the eschatological speculations and the undesirable social, economic and political effects these might cause. But there is no need for advanced historical or religious knowledge to understand that the institution of the church survives because it relies on the importance of the future. Eschatology can only be futuristic. People can be religiously subjected only if they are promised an extraordinary, out of this world purpose. And a purpose can only be in the future. If redemption and the Kingdom of God would already be here and now, then the institution of the church would be useless. This is the reason why futurism was adopted by Catholics at the Counter-Reformation and, together with dispensationalism adopted by many Neo-Protestants, is at the moment the most widespread school of eschatological interpretation.

The root of the eschatological uncertainty might not stand in the manner the Book of Revelation has been interpreted, but in the false premise that it reflects prophetic truth.

First, the year in which John wrote Revelation is not known. Preterists contend that the moment of writing must be before the year 70, when the Temple was destroyed. But Irenaeus says that John wrote Revelation at the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian, which ended in the year 96. [727] Irenaeus was the disciple of Polycarp, who in turn was the disciple of John the Apostle. [728]

Second, the conditions of the seven churches from the beginning of the book describe an ecclesiastical context of second generation. Polycarp, the first bishop of Smyrna, was born in the year 69. This means that the church from this place did not exist in the year 64, when Nero started the persecution. If Revelation was written before the year 70, it would have overlapped with Paul’s epistles. While the Church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) is accused of abandoning faith and joining the sect of the Nicolaitans, Paul mentions

nothing about this situation in his epistles to the Ephesians and to Timothy. Likewise, the Church of Laodicea was rebuked for its richness and vainglory (Revelation 3:14-22), but Paul praises it three times (Colossians 2:2; 4:13, 16).

Third, the imagery of the Book of Revelation is doubtful. It depicts the heavenly realm as an earthly kingdom, a conception inherited from Roman and Greek mythologies. Both the Roman and Greek gods were depicted living in a divine society similar to the monarchical human courts. Jupiter and Zeus, the supreme deities of the two cultures, were sitting on the throne, from where they commanded the Universe. In similar fashion, God sits on a throne like a human emperor, he has servants, he opens the book of life as emperors opened and read the sentences of the tried, he breaks seals and gives orders. Jupiter and Zeus manifested their wrath by throwing thunderbolts, while God in Revelation punishes people through a variety of natural catastrophes. The supreme deities were surrounded by gods with precise functions: the god of beauty, the god of war, the god of music and so forth. In Revelation every heavenly subordinate – angel, saint or redeemed man – also has a precise function: messenger, warrior or worshiper. On a close analysis these descriptions come in contradiction with God's basic features: God does not need, for example, servants or to give orders because he is all-powerful, or he does not need books because he is all-knowing.

And fourth, it is not clear who the author of the book is. Polycarp, Papias, Jerome or Augustine accepted John the Apostle as the author of Revelation. On the other hand, Caius of Rome, the Alogi sect or Dionysius of Alexandria rejected the text on the ground that it had not been written by John. Dionysius said that the text is dangerous and he argued that there are significant differences of style and approach between the Gospel of John and the Revelation of John. [729] Revelation was omitted from *Peshito* , a 2nd-century Syriac translation of the Bible. So did Cyril of Jerusalem, who excluded it from the canonical books, while Eusebius refused to take a position, preferring to reproduce the pros and cons. [730] Revelation was not universally accepted in the East, most likely because it fueled the millenarism of the Montanist heresy. Another reason might be the fact that the text was perceived as a synthesis of the Neronian persecution and it was associated with the Jewish apocalyptic treaties written to encourage faith and to offer

hope in hard times. And last but not least, at the Council of Laodicea in 364, when the canonical texts of the Bible were established, the controversial canon 60 excluded the Book of Revelation from the list. [731]

The Book of Revelation is the mirror of the Book of Genesis. Together, the two reflect the ancient and medieval mystical conception about the circularity of the Universe. Genesis begins with the creation of the world, Revelation ends with the destruction of this world and the creation of another world; in Genesis people are thrown out of Paradise on Earth, in Revelation they are taken from Earth and placed in a new Paradise; in Genesis humanity turns from innocence and immortality to sin and mortality, while in Revelation the transformation is the other way around. The Bible is supposed to be the story of the world, and any story has a beginning and an end. Thus, Revelation might have been included in the biblical canon due to the need of closure. The Bible had to end with an Apocalypse, and if it was not John's, then it would have been one of those categorized as apocryphal.

Chapter II. THE CHRISTIAN AMERICAN APOCALYPTIC MANIFESTATIONS

1. CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

On August 3, 1492, with the support of the Spanish royalty, Christopher Columbus left the port of Palos having under his command three caravels and 120 people. The purpose of his journey was to discover a new maritime route toward the Indies through the west. After more than four months spent on the Atlantic, on October 12 Columbus stepped on what he thought were the West Indies. He returned to Spain in March 1493, and the success of his discoveries convinced the Spanish crown to finance two additional expeditions, in 1493 and 1498. A couple of years later the Italian Amerigo Vespucci demonstrated that Columbus had discovered in fact a new continent. Accordingly, this was named "America," from the feminized Latin version of Amerigo. Columbus indeed did not know that he had discovered a

new continent, but he was aware that he had discovered a new land. And not just any land, but the land from the proximity of the Garden of Eden.

At the time of Columbus's voyage there were several views regarding Earth's shape, size and dimensions. Europe, Africa and Asia – the only continents discovered – were little known and they were not positioned on the maps as they are today. A major challenge was depicting the world together with Eden, from where the first people were banished. The beliefs of Mesopotamia depicted Earth as a flat disk. In the 7th century in *Etymologiae* Isidore of Seville stated that the earth is like a "wheel," with the land divided into three parts and surrounded by waters. And, while Palestine and Jerusalem were placed in the center, the Garden of Eden had to be somewhere in the eastern extremity of Asia (Genesis 2:8), isolated from the rest of the world. Indeed, at the time Asia was understood differently than it is today, [732] but Columbus's clear intent was to reach the eastern extremity of Asia by travelling west. Other beliefs said that the Garden of Eden was placed on the highest mountain. In the *Divine Comedy – Purgatory* Dante depicts the land as a mountain in seven stairs (a ziggurat or pyramid) surrounded by waters, with Eden on the last stair. The spherical Earth was initially promoted by Hellenistic culture and later by astronomical calculations. In the 4th century Lactantius Firmianus virulently criticized the idea of a spherical Earth and said it was a fabrication of the pagan philosophers. [733] An intermediary conception depicted a pear-shaped Earth – an image adopted by Columbus as well. The Garden of Eden had to be protuberant on Earth's surface in order to remain untouched by the Flood. The Sun was rising from Eden and on the maps it was placed where now the North Pole is positioned. According to the Bible, the four great rivers of the world were springing from Eden: Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel (Tigris) and Euphrates (Genesis 2:10-14). These were supplying the world's oceans and seas.

Due to the obvious location of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, initially Eden was believed to be hidden in Asia Minor. But this image was reconsidered after the Christian crusaders and pilgrims dissected the region. The development of geographic knowledge moved the place of Eden in the most mysterious and inaccessible places, from the banks of the Ganges, on the island of Ceylon, to different locations in Africa. In the 16th century it was America's turn to host Eden. [734]

Faithful to the bone, the admiral was convinced that he managed to cross the Atlantic due to a well-established plan of God. But the purpose of this maritime odyssey was revealed only in the third trip. In May 1498, when the Spanish fleet arrived at the mouth of the Orinoco River in Venezuela, the admiral experienced an epiphany. The beauty of the place, the water debit that was flowing directly into the sea and the warm atmosphere – it was thought that in Eden there is always springtime – made him believe that he discovered the exterior part of the Garden of Eden. [735]

Discovering Eden was a source of joy, because God chose him to fulfill such a great plan, but also a source of concern, because it announced the terrible day of God's judgment. The only biblical books that describe man's dwelling in Eden are Genesis and Revelation. And because the regaining of Paradise by man will happen only after the destruction of the old world, Columbus concluded that the end is near: "Of the new firmament and land, which the Lord made, as Saint John writes in the Apocalypse (after what had been said by the mouth of Isaiah), He made me His messenger, and pointed out the way to me." [736]

Until the 21st century dozens of scholars analyzed Columbus's life. But a major source about him and his voyage, written by the admiral himself, has remained largely ignored. In the summer of 1501 Columbus sketched his only manuscript for publication purposes, entitled *El libro de las profecías* ("The Book of Prophecies"). This is a compilation of almost 200 prophetic texts, biblical passages, commentaries of medieval and ancient authors and his own opinions. The basic structure of the work is composed of 84 *folio* (10 pages are missing), divided into an introduction and four parts. [737]

Written between the third and the fourth voyage, *El libro de las profecías* links the discoveries of the author to biblical texts such as John 10:15-16 and compares the voyage in the "dark sea" with the journey of the Israelites in the desert toward Canaan. Columbus believed that the secret of his success was the gift of understanding offered to him by the Holy Spirit. [738] The admiral never claimed to be a prophet, but he was remarkably well-educated in the Bible, the "foundation of all knowledge." The most used extra-biblical sources were Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi* (he made almost 900 references to this work) and *Historia rerum ubique gestarum* of Pope Pius II. [739]

El libro de las profecías was the framework against which the admiral wished his achievements to be seen. The main theme of the book is that an important phase of the apocalyptic prophecy was fulfilled through his discoveries:

> *The Holy Scriptures testify in the Old Testament, by the mouth of the prophets, and in the New [Testament], by our Savior Jesus Christ, that this world will come to an end: Matthew, Mark, and Luke have recorded the signs of the age; the prophets had also abundantly foretold it... Our Savior said that before the consummation of this world, all that was written by the Prophets must be fulfilled.* [740]

The admiral believed that the discovery of the Garden of Eden is one of the events preceding Parousia, alongside the conversion of the Jews, the rise of the messianic emperor or the rise of the Antichrist from the tribe of Dan. In a letter addressed to the crowns of Spain, he openly expressed his concern with the upcoming end of the world:

> *St. Augustine says that the end of this world will occur in the seventh millennium following the Creation; the sacred theologians accept his interpretation, in particular the cardinal Pierre d'Ailly ... From the creation of the world, or from Adam, until the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ figure 5,343 years and 318 days, by the calculation of King Alfonso [Astronomical Tables] which is held as the most accurate. (Pierre d'Ailly. e.a.e e.t. et h.v. [Elucidarium astronomice concordie cum theologica et historica veritate...]) Adding these figures to the approximate 1,501 years [since the birth of Christ in Columbus's time], the total is an approximate 6,845 years. According to this calculation, there are but 155 years left for the fulfillment of the seven thousand, at which time I said before, by the authorities cited, that the world will come to an end.* [741]

The belief in the millennial week, the Jewish Antichrist or the ultimate triumph of the Christian religion reveal the influence d'Ailly and other medieval mystics had upon the admiral. [742] The letter was conceived in 1502 which means that the end of the world, according to Columbus's calculations, was about to take place around 1657. Nevertheless, he was aware of Christ's words – that no one knows the moment of Parousia – and he cited Matthew

24:36 in *folio* 25. [743]

Columbus's role in the cosmic drama was to carry Christ's message to those who never heard it, thus preparing the way for the evangelization of the last non-Christian lands according to Matthew 24:14 and Psalms 22:27. The New World had shown that it has many riches, which, in the opinion of Columbus, should have been invested in missionary activities and in the reconquest of the Holy Land. As David offered Solomon the necessary wealth to build the Temple on Mount Zion, Columbus saw himself giving the gold to the Spanish messianic emperor. This would launch the final crusade against Jews and Muslims and would make Jerusalem, the city of the Great King from Psalm 48:2, the spiritual and political center of the world. [744]

Although he makes references to Joachim of Fiore, the sibylline prophecies and Pseudo-Methodius, the admiral limited his quotations, with few exceptions, to the Church Fathers and respected medieval theologians. Columbus respected Catholic dogma and his conclusions were conservative. At a time when the clouds of Reformation were gathering above Europe, he did not criticized the church, the state or the society and he also did not speak about a *renovatio ecclesiae* or a *reformatio mundi* as Protestants understood them. His writings confirmed the established order by defending the apocalyptic roles of the church, Spain and its Catholic monarchs. The only case in which he interpreted an event without relying on the support of an authority was when he proclaimed that his discovery fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah and Revelation regarding the new heaven and the new earth.

Early biographers treated Columbus's apocalyptic beliefs as a natural product of the 16th century. Agostino Giustaniani, bishop of Nebbio, noticed that the admiral frequently claimed that he had fulfilled the prophecy of spreading the gospel in the entire world, [745] while Bartolomé de las Casas admitted the providential role of Columbus in the exploration of the world. [746] But every nation portrays its heroes in a distorted way because heroes are its icons. Columbus is the first American hero and every generation has portrayed Columbus according to its own preconceptions. Since the 19th century the admiral's beliefs turned into a source of embarrassment: his theological interpretation of the new continent was a fallacy. So, the thinkers of the Industrial Era rejected the idea that the discovery of the Americas had "less

rational" motivations than money. This is the reason why today he is a rationalist who fought against ignorance and ecclesiastical superstition and this is the reason why his religiosity is categorized as a myth or a product of a tired mind. *El libro de las profecías* has taken the form of a tool for satisfying the mystical needs of the queen and convince her that he was a man who was destined to bring home extraordinary treasures. Undoubtedly, the Spanish monarchs invested huge funds in these expeditions thinking of profit. But, whether we like it or not, the heroes of the past had been driven by beliefs and ideas that in our days might be considered naive or irrational. And the main motivational force of the admiral was God and spiritual riches, not money and worldly honors.

2. THE COLONIZATION OF AMERICA AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

2.1. THE RELIGIOUS MIRAGE OF THE NEW WORLD

At the moment any discovery or unusual phenomenon is attempted to be explained first and foremost through a scientific reasoning. At the end of the 15th century, things were quite the opposite: everything, from empirical observations, geographic discoveries to astronomical calculations, had to be reconciled with faith and framed in an all-inclusive religious scheme. God's omnipresence demanded everything to have a purpose. In this way America became an attractive spatial and temporal framework, free to be filled with anyone's needs and ideas. Columbus believed that the new land was part of Asia and it was sheltering the Garden of Eden. After Amerigo Vespucci demonstrated that it was a new continent, America became Atlantis. Francisco López de Gómara in *Historia general de las Indias* (1552), Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in *Historia de los Incas* (1572), or Francis Bacon in *New Atlantis* (1627) linked the new continent to Plato's legend. Others, Jews and Christians alike, [747] identified the Amerindians with the Lost Tribes of Israel. This point of view conveniently solved a biblical mystery, but indirectly promoted America as the new heaven and the new earth from Revelation 21 and the imminence of the end. Another problem was if the natives had a soul and should be evangelized or did not have a soul and could be taken as slaves. A Lutheran theory depicted the new land as the dreadful

darkness from outside the gospel where the lost ones are treated with whipping and the gnashing of teeth, while for Anglicans the colonies were only a bunch of fanatics, swarmed in the wilderness to put into practice their aberrant ideas. [748]

The first settlers of the Americas were Spanish and Portuguese who mainly followed the oceanic path established by Columbus. They established Catholicism as the dominant religion of South America, but their expeditions chiefly aimed to obtain economic advantages rather than religious ones. Instead, North America was colonized by French, Dutch, Germans and especially English people who sought spiritual benefits.

The colonization of the northeastern part of America gained momentum only in the 17th century, at the time of the Great Migration. The expression “Great Migration” refers to the migration of the English colonists, mainly Puritans, who traveled to Massachusetts between 1620 and 1640. Before the start of the English Civil War the English Protestants were divided into two groups: the separatists, who wished to interrupt any connection with Anglicanism and to establish a new church; and the moderates, who aimed to purify the Church of England through reform. Due to the climate of political instability and the anti-dissident tyranny imposed by Charles I and Archbishop William Laud, Calvinists, Puritans and nonconformists left the country and took refuge in Ireland, the Netherlands or other European countries. Others chose to risk in America, having in mind the incomparable spiritual benefits. The immensity of the Atlantic was negating the influence of European authorities, while the wilderness of the New World offered space and resources for any kind of social or religious project. [749]

The expression “Great Migration” does not refer to the number of immigrants, which was smaller compared to the number of Englishmen who migrated to Ireland, but rather to their quality. Between 1629 and 1640, at the peak of the phenomenon, around 20,000 men, women and children left England to settle forever across the Atlantic. This mass of people was predominantly formed of families with a high level of literacy, which came from urban areas and belonged to the middle class. At the moment of the departure they were around the age of 30 and they had three or more children, with the capability and the desire to further procreate. Overall, the colonists

of Massachusetts Bay were able to gain a comfortable living, having the possibility to economize. They did not spend their dispensable income on silverware, pieces of pottery or household goods according to the European mindset, but on religious books. In 1662 the Puritan Michael Wigglesworth sold nearly 100,000 copies of his work of poems *The Day of Doom, Or, A Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment* , the first American best-seller. [750]

For the English it was a greater economic risk to leave than to stay. Nevertheless, they chose to trade the relatively prosperous lifestyle of a corrupt England with a more precarious economic situation tempered by the opportunity to live more piously. The early American Puritans lived under the impression that their transatlantic exodus was as important as the crusades or the journey of the Israelites toward Canaan. God made with them a new covenant through which he chose them to be a model of religiosity for the other nations of the world. With England deviating from the right path, the colonists believed that God acted to preserve a remnant of his herd by placing it in the safety offered by the isolation of the ocean and wilderness. The discovery of America shortly before the outburst of the Reformation was a proof of divine intervention. The emigrants surely asked themselves what they would eat, where they would sleep, where they would live or what they would work. But, as God took care of the Israelites in their journey through the desert, the belief in a divine plan gave them hope that he would be on their side as well in their journey to America. [751]

The New World gave birth to a new religious paradigm, in the detriment of the Old World. In the summer of 1630 John Winthrop led 11 ships and 700 passengers to Massachusetts Bay. Winthrop played an important role not only during the journey, but especially at its end, in the New World. Besides the fact that he was chosen the governor of the colony and became a much respected political figure, Winthrop wrote the sermon *A model of Christian charity* , better known as *City upon a hill* . In it, he described the image of a new society, ideas and plans to keep Puritanism strong, and the challenges of the new continent. [752]The name *City upon a hill* is in fact a phrase from the parable of Jesus about salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). As Jesus prepared his apostles before sending them in the Old World, Winthrop’s sermon, delivered on the ship *Arbella* , spiritually instructed the newcomers before

they colonized the New World. And, as the mission of the apostles was to spread the Christian religion, the mission of the colonists was to establish a nation of saints, a model of Christianity and morality for the entire world:

> *For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken ... we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God ... we shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land where we are going.* [753]

Winthrop's sermon is the first written enunciation of American exceptionalism – a theory which maintains that the United States of America has a special place among the nations of the world in terms of national creed, historical evolution or political and religious institutions. [754] At the beginning of his sermon Winthrop showed that a healthy Puritan life requires social and economic equality and constant communication between the members of a group. In this way the everyday activities bring spiritual resonance within the community, faith is kept strong and there is no occasion for pride and resentment. Winthrop's exhortation to the people who were about to set foot in America reveals the visionary sense of the early settlers and the emerging American mindset. For this kind of Puritans Anglicanism was incompletely reformed and insufficiently separated from the Catholic rituals and dogmas. Unlike the separatist pilgrims, who believed that the only hope was to leave the Church of England and to start a new church, the moderate Puritans remained part of the Anglican community to purify it from within. Once arrived in the New World, they had the possibility to reform Anglicanism according to their own ideas. They hoped that through their example they would convince the church placed on the other side of the Atlantic to adopt similar reforms. [755]

The Puritans understood religious freedom only as a way of life according to their own precepts. They did not tolerate dissidence and treated the religious radicals in the same way they had been treated by Anglicans in England: through censorship, exile and punishment. When Roger Williams disappointingly discovered that the civil magistrates were punishing idolatry,

non-observance of the Sabbath, false worship and blasphemy as in Europe, he left the existing churches [756] and moved south, where he founded the settlement of Providence. This later became the capital of the State of Rhode Island and a haven for the radical refugees. Anne Hutchinson, one of the first promoters of gender equality and the admission of woman in priesthood, was banished from Massachusetts Bay in August 1637, but she was welcomed in Rhode Island. After he claimed that all Adam's progenies inherit the divine perfection, Samuel Gorton was arrested by Massachusetts authorities in 1643 and sent to London. He returned to Rhode Island in 1648. In 1656 the Quaker missionaries Mary Fisher and Ann Austin were beaten, imprisoned in miserable conditions and deprived of food, water and light. Their books were burned and most of their property confiscated. Again, the Quakers were persecuted in Massachusetts, but they were welcome in Rhode Island. [757]

The religious boundaries engaged territorial boundaries. The first American states were very small in comparison to the later ones because the early colonists wished a clear and visible barrier between their religious conceptions. Virginia was established as an Anglican state, Maine as a Catholic state, while Massachusetts and Connecticut was dominated by the Puritans. In addition to Rhode Island, the states of Delaware, New Jersey, North Carolina and Pennsylvania also tolerated nonconformists who aimed to experiment in America the wildest and most ambitious religious projects. Pennsylvania was founded by William Penn exactly with the purpose to offer a peaceful place for Quakers. In 1681 Penn became the owner of a huge area of land situated between the region of New England and the plantations of Virginia and invited the persecuted sects of Europe to populate it. The settlement of Philadelphia, which became the capital of the State of Pennsylvania, was named after the seventh church enumerated at the beginning of the Book of Revelation, praised by Christ for its firm faith (Revelation 3:7-13). Likewise, thousands of American settlements got religious names, according to the religion and aspirations of those who founded them. Catholics (particularly the Spanish) used names of saints from within their religion (San Francisco – "Saint Francis of Assisi"; Los Angeles – "The Angels"; San Jose – "Saint Joseph"), while the Puritans, the radicals and the dissidents used apocalyptic or Jewish names (Jerusalem; Newark – "*New Ark* " of the Covenant; Salem – from the Jewish *shalom* , which means "peace").

Separatists or moderates, the Puritans created a deeply religious culture, tightly-knit, politically innovative, with features that came to define the American nation. Together with many other radical sects, they supported utopian social and religious aims; [758] their new society from America was to be a paradise on Earth, a community that had to precede the kingdom of Christ. These visions downright fantastic formed the doctrine of American exceptionalism, which became a sacrosanct part of American ideology.

2.2. COTTON MATHER AND THE APOCALYPSE OF THE WITCHES

American Puritanism said that historical events reflect the divine plan and mankind is hopeless. Human beings are completely depraved (due to Adam's fall), and the world cannot be saved through good deeds, but only through the grace of a testy, vengeful, jealous and fear-inspiring God. Regardless of our actions, only a limited number of people have been chosen to have eternal life in Heaven, while the rest of humanity is condemned to suffer the eternal torments of Hell. God and his worship in the church was the core of the Puritan life. The church dictated the dark and sober garment, the members were expected to live according to a strict moral code, and they believed that all sins – from sleeping during sermons to food theft – are severely punished by Providence. Men and women sat separately in the church, and their presence during the extremely long and boring ceremonies was compulsory. The religious rigidity created a tight Puritan society, within which both Satan and God had important roles in everyday life. In this limited and religiously oriented society, power and esteem were not measured in money, but in biblical knowledge. And the champion of this domain was Cotton Mather, one of the most popular apocalyptic speakers of all time.

Mather was the preacher of the first Puritan church of Boston and a man of extraordinary theological training. The prolific writing and the literary omnipresence, assured through more than 450 publications, made Mather a fearsome force in the spiritual and secular problems of the place. Yet, despite his erudition, Mather's thinking was limited to the borders of the inept Puritan mindset. His writings largely treated the same theme: the unfolding of the final acts of history. His most important work, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (roughly, "The Glorious Works of Christ in America"), was

meant to be an ideological continuation of the Bible and of God's intervention in history and in the New World. For example, Mather compared the Great Puritan Migration with the Egyptian Exodus, both the products of an invisible force. Likewise, the travels in America of prominent leaders such as John Elliot, John Winthrop or his father Increase Mather were likened to the travels of Noah or Abraham. In *Nehemiah Americanus* Mather likens Winthrop with the biblical hero Nehemiah. And, as Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem, Winthrop was depicted as the founder of the American Jerusalem.

Other writings, especially his journals, seem to depict the final siege of the forces of darkness upon the world of men, signaled through various contemporary apocalyptic signs. For example, the earthquake in 1663 was due to the breaking of the sixth seal from Revelation 6:12-13. The terrible epidemics and the diseases of the time could have been the works of the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse, Death. The famine that struck Boston could have been seen as the anger of the third horseman, Famine. In 1682 another natural event polished Mather's point of view: the appearance of Halley's Comet. Mather dedicated the sermon *Heavens alarm and the later sign* to this magnificent occurrence. The Puritan theologian was also the witness to two wars. The first one took place in 1675 between the Puritans of New England and the native tribe Wampanoag. In 1689 another war erupted, when the Puritans had to confront their northern neighbors, the French, in one of the many conflicts meant to determine the dominant nation in the United States of America. The struggles of the colonists could have been seen as the rise of nation against nation from Matthew 24:6-7, brought by the second horseman, Conquest. The Amerindian savages that were organizing raids in the cities could have been seen as the materialization of the first horseman, War. This multitude of tragedies forced Mather to take refuge in the biblical study in order to find out how the forces of darkness act in the final days. [759]

The early generations of colonists saw themselves abnormally susceptible to the influence of the devil. By interpreting the Bible literally, the everyday life of the common Puritan was characterized by a continuous struggle between good and evil. Satan, they believed, had selected the easiest targets – women, children and madmen – to continue his despicable work. It was believed that if a man's name is written in Satan' s black book, then that man gains an invisible bewitched form and becomes a tool of the devil. The Puritans, as the

new chosen people of God, expected a fierce retaliation from the devil to thwart their plans. [760] The imminent return of Christ had to be preceded by a global devilish assault, a pronounced spiritual decline, followed by an extraordinary outpouring of the spirit and a spiritual revival.

This was the colonial climate in 1688, when the four children of the mason John Goodwin in Salem, a village close to Boston, contacted a strange disease. They synchronously experienced pains, spasms, slurred speech and seizures – the typical symptoms of demonic possession. Mather, who saw in this case a good opportunity to explore the spiritual realm, successfully treated them with fasting and prayer. He put the unusual occurrence on paper and published it in 1689 as *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* . His conclusion was that the symptoms had been caused by a wizardly stratagem. [761]

In January 1692 Abigail Williams and Elizabeth Parris, followed by other girls in Salem, were touched by a similar disease. For anyone who was familiar with Mather's writings, Salem seemed to be the target of a massive spiritual attack. This frightful prospect started one the most notorious mass hysteria in the history of America. [762] In a couple of weeks tens of residents of Salem and from the surroundings were being accused of witchcraft based on suspicious behavior or because they were not respecting the Puritan code of garments and traditions. For Mather, however, this was not an ordinary manifestation of evil, but a sign of the imminent end:

> *The New-Englanders are a People of God ... We have been advised by some Credible Christians yet alive, that a Malefactor, accused of Witchcraft as well as Murder, and Executed in this place more than Forty Years ago, did then give Notice of, An Horrible Plot against the Country by Witchcraft, and a Foundation of Witchcraft then laid, which if it were not seasonably discovered, would probably Blow up, and pull down all the Churches in the Country. And we have now with Horror seen the Discovery of such a Witchcraft! An army of Devils is horribly broke in upon the place which is the Center.* *[763]*

According to Mather, the witches were a part of the devil's army, while the eruption of evil was the proof that Satan was assembling in Salem the combatant forces for the Battle of Armageddon. In other words, a couple of

doubtful accusations of witchcraft from a small village of fishermen became crucial for the world's fate. It was simply an absurdity. On August 4, 1962, the Puritan theologian delivered a sermon in which he warned that the Judgment is at hand and he almost called himself, the chief of justice and the governor as the leading triumvirate of the final assault against the devilish legions. [764]

Due to the importance of the situation, a special court was established to investigate and judge the case. Mather had never presided over a jury, but he exercised a powerful influence upon the course of the trial. Three of the five judges delegated to judge the case were friends of Mather or members of his church; they heard his sermons and they were largely convinced that the Prince of Darkness was preparing for war. Previously, the court asked for the advice of the most influential ministers of New England. The collective response came through a letter signed by Mather, in which he stated that there was an epidemic of witches initiated by the devil, that Satan can take the form of an innocent man and that the court must take into consideration spectral evidence (ghostly, out of this world). [765] Today, such evidence is inadmissible in a court of the civilized world.

On the course of the investigation Margaret Jacobs was tortured and threatened until she admitted that she was a witch together with three other persons, including her grandfather. [766] All three were condemned and executed by hanging. Giles Corey was pressed to death. [767] Even a 4-year-old girl, Dorothy Good, was accused of witchcraft and forced to testify against her own mother. Sarah Good was found guilty and hanged. The girl was released after eight months, but she remained with lifelong sequelae. [768] Overall, over 100 people were accused, 19 ended hanged and at least four died in prison under suspicious circumstances until the end of the investigation. This horrible view shows that while the Puritans condemned the Catholic Church for its wickedness, their actions were crueler than those of the Inquisition. They fled from Europe due to Catholic restraints, but in America they persecuted and imposed their beliefs in a draconian way.

On August 19, 1692, during the third round of executions, five persons found guilty of witchcraft were on Gallows Hill in Salem waiting for their end. During the ceremony Mather was present on horseback, dominating the

crowd. The exact order of the executions is not known, but when George Burroughs's turn came (the second priest of Salem), something shocking happened. With the noose around the neck Burroughs did something that was considered impossible for a wizard to do: he began to recite a prayer to God. At that moment Mather had to choose: was he supposed to intervene because this man was not a wizard, or the execution had to continue? If he had stopped the execution the consequences would have been incommensurable: he would have admitted that he and the judges had been wrong, the other convicts would have been declared innocent, the trial itself would have turned into an unpardonable error that had cost human lives, all his work would have become a lie and the sacred ideology that guided his life would have been revealed as false. It was an abyss that Mather had to avoid at any cost. So, he turned to the stunned crowd and he loudly declared that the devil had helped Burroughs recite the prayer from within him by transforming himself into an angel of light. [769] His dominating speech suppressed any suspicion regarding the innocence of Burroughs, and the executions continued unhindered.

Indeed, Mather suppressed an event that could have saved eight human lives. Instead, the hysteria continued and in the end at least 24 persons died in vain. One year later Mather published *Wonders of the Invisible World* , in which he detailed the case and defended his decisions. But the subsequent analyses proved that the Salem witch trials were nothing more than a deadly error. Numerous theories regarding the objective cause of this mass hysteria have been launched, and none of them points out that there was a real case of witchcraft. On the contrary, the initial pieces of evidence that indicated the presence of the devil can easily be refuted or attributed to natural phenomena (diseases, intoxication), while the direct accusations most likely had been caused by ignorance, rivalries, tortures, threats or even the boredom emerged in a society suffocated by Bible reading.

3. THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING

Although the colonists stepped on the shore of the new Promised Land with optimism, eager to live in freedom, the English parochial system supported by Anglicans and Puritans was hardly implemented in the New World.

Unlike the compact communities of the Old World, the small farms of America spread into the wilderness, far from a parochial house. The individual was most of the time on his own, struggling to survive and to adapt to an inhospitable land. This aspect seriously affected the attendance to sermons and the ecclesiastical discipline of the common people and it heavily put to the test the secular and ecclesiastical structures. Almost 100 years after John Winthrop's encouraging discourse a large part of the population was outside the churches. People were willing to live and share their beliefs, but they did not have the possibility of doing so. Thus, when the settlers finally had the opportunity, the religious fervor was so intense and widespread that it took the shape of a mass phenomenon called "great awakening."

The "religious awakening" (or the "religious revival," this rather referring to local isolated phenomena) is an expression that designates a specific period of increased spiritual interest, a renewal in the religious life of a large area and the establishment of a fervent relation with God after a period of decline. Three great awakenings took place between 1700 and 1900 and all three were accompanied by a surge of interest in the religious phenomena, mass conversions, miracles, a deep sense of guilt and contrition, a rewriting of the religious dynamics and an outbreak of new groups and movements.

The First Great Awakening was not continuous or instantaneous because the means of transportation and communication of the time did not allow it. Instead, revivals occurred in many locations, at various distances of time one from another. Accordingly, the First Great Awakening can be, vaguely, defined as a period of intense religious activity in the British colonies of North America between the years 1730-1740, with echoes until 1770. It had a permanent impact upon the religious life of the colonists and it was a decisive event for the establishment of the American nation. The awakening developed through the punitive type of preaching, which inspired listeners with a sense of personal guilt and a need of salvation through Christ. It changed piety and self-consciousness, encouraged introspection and transformed religion into an intense personal experience by distancing the believers from rituals and ceremonies. It brought Christ to Afro-American slaves and challenged the dominant authority. It remodeled the Congregational, Baptist and Methodist churches, but it had a minor impact upon Anglicanism and Quakerism.

The First Great Awakening designates a religious phenomenon which occurred strictly on American soil, but in fact it was part of a larger movement of revival that took place on both sides of the Atlantic. In the Protestant cultures of Scotland, Germany and especially England a new age of faith rose to counteract the Enlightenment, to restate the vision of the religious truth based on emotion and not on reason, to feel rather than to think, to believe in divine revelations to the detriment of calculations and empirical observations. The Christian worship became too formal, with clergymen who read their dense, complex and hard to follow sermons. By contrast, the leaders of the First Great Awakening did not aim to capture the minds of the parishioners, but to trigger an emotional response in the audience. The sermons full of pathos and without too much theological elements were the essence of the movement; like a drug, they incited the audience to experience the enthusiastic worship and triggered emotional and spontaneous conversion. This approach decentralized religion and encouraged the listeners to become more emotionally involved in their own destiny and to study the Bible individually or in family groups.

Jonathan Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737) was a sort of guide about how to successfully lead a sermon. Edwards's techniques were copied by many laymen and clergymen, who in turn became itinerant preachers and further spread the phenomenon of the Great Awakening. [770] Edwards was a natural-born emotional manipulator. In order to describe the insignificant human destiny in front of a deity that controls all things, in *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741) he used the image of a spider that trembles on the web above a fire. His point of view was that, at any moment, the line of life can break and we fall into the fires of eternal damnation. [771] During his sermons Edwards began to witness waves of conversions accompanied by strange behaviors: people were barking, screaming, shouting, whistling, singing or convulsing. He analyzed and named these controversial phenomena "corporal effects" or indicators of the work of the Holy Spirit. In *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746) he came to the conclusion that the divine visit usually overwhelms the body, and therefore the uncontrolled excitability is the sign of the moral improvement of the individual. Accordingly, the revivalistic preachers aimed to obtain emotional responses from the audience by any means necessary, even through terrorizing sermons, and even from children.

These kinds of manifestations came to be studied from a scientific point of view only in the 20th century. And they have nothing to do with the divine. These happen due to the obsessive desire of some people to feel the divine through their own senses or through their own body. They temporarily put aside the inner censorship of reason and the control of their own body and let themselves be carried away by stimuli and euphoria. The message and the rhythm of prayers act like a drug, helping the individual reach the border between sleep and consciousness and enter a state of self-imposed hypnosis. The brain no longer filters the inner and outer stimuli and these, no matter how trivial or irrational they are, are transmitted to the muscles causing shakings, meaningless vocal sounds that are interpreted as the language of the angels, screamings or dances. The manifestations overburden the body, which no longer feels fatigue, hunger, thirst, stress, and ultimately fainting. Mediums live similar experiences when, allegedly, the soul of the dead invade their body in order to communicate with the living.

The easiest way to cause terror among the listeners was by invoking terrifying images of Judgment Day, the ten vials of wrath or the devouring flames of Hell. Edwards frequently warned about the upcoming end, rebuked his listeners and named them depraved sinners at the absolute mercy of the angry God. For almost three decades he kept a notebook in which he noted commentaries regarding Revelation and apparent signs from his time. An adherent of Protestant historicism, he identified the Reformation with the fifth vial of wrath from Revelation 16, when the gospel was spread among pagans, the doctrine was revived, papal power was reduced and religious persecutions diminished. The Papacy or the Antichrist had to continue his domination until the termination of the 1,260 years, after which an outpouring of the spirit in the whole world – begun with the First Great Awakening – would lead to the destruction of the Beast. Within a century and a half Muslims would be defeated, banished from Europe and Palestine, the Jews would convert and the Millennium would begin. [772]

Another important figure of the American awakening was the British preacher George Whitefield. Whitefield allied with John and Charles Wesley and together they led a movement of reform of the Church of England that eventually resulted in the formation of the Methodist Church. From 1739, when he was only 24 years old, until 1770 Whitefield visited America seven

times. His success was due to an emotional and novelistic style of preaching based on personal charisma. The strong voice, the exceptional oratorical skills, the spiritual zeal, the short stature and the appearance of crossed eyes (believed to be a sign of divine favors) raised him to the status of an American celebrity. His enthusiastic, improvised and itinerant preaching was a religious circus. The dramatic gestures, the weeping, the laughter or the threats of Hell and brimstone against sinners made the sermon a theatrical act. Surnamed the "Great Itinerant," Whitefield attracted large numbers of people and generated conversions and controversies everywhere he went. The key to the true religious experience, according to Whitefield, sits in the thrill of conversion, and not in the cold and rational living of religion characteristic to the Enlightenment. [773]

Through the First Great Awakening the marginal groups grew and began to influence the social and political aspects. Quakerism was the first organization in history that forbade holding slaves by its members. Concentrated in Pennsylvania, a state of the radicals, the Quakers established the most powerful societies of the time for the abolition of slavery. Their efforts helped Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson convince the Continental Congress to ban the import of slaves in America starting from December 1775. By 1792 several states had similar anti-slavery groups, and in 1804 slavery was completely abolished in the region of New England.

The First Great Awakening marked the start of a significant number of utopian communities as well, such as Henry Bernard Koster's True Church of Philadelphia, or Brotherly Love in Plymouth Johann Zimmermann's the New Mooners, or Matthias Bauman's the Newborns in Oley Valley. [774] Of all, Johann Conrad Beissel's Ephrata Cloister (or the Ephrata Community) was the most famous and prosperous, flourishing for about 40 years. It was formed of celibatarians because Beissel's Hermetic piety required a repudiation of human sexuality through a severe monastic regime of physical work, isolation, self-discipline and biblical study. They were resting on wooden benches 15 inches wide, with pieces of wood as pillows, six hours per night, from nine o'clock in the evening till midnight and from two o'clock till five in the morning. During the two-hour break they watched for Christ's return. They were eating only once a day, having a vegetarian diet. Only once a year, at the Eucharist, they were consuming lamb. [775]

Celibacy was the core of the Shaker ideology as well. In a world dominated in all aspects by men, one of the boldest and most original groups of the First Great Awakening was led by a woman. Migrants from England, [776] the Shaker Quakers led by Ann Lee established a utopian community in the wilderness at Niskeyuna waiting for the Millennium. The official name of the group was the "United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing," but for the outsiders it was simply "Shakerism." [777] Ann Lee's Shaker Quakers distinguished themselves from mainstream Quakers through the denial of marriage, [778] food deprivation, sleep deprivation, hard work, long prayers and fasts, and the worship of an androgynous God that incarnated at the First Coming in the male Jesus and he would incarnate at the Second Coming as a woman. Their meetings started with a period of meditation during which they were expecting the coming of the spirit to cleanse them from sin. The silence was quickly interrupted by dramatic manifestations: the believers were openly confessing their sins, followed by violent shakings, ecstatic dance, singings, screams, whistles and prophecies. [779] Ann Lee's adherents believed that she was the embodiment of the "woman arrayed with the sun" from Revelation 12:1 or the feminine incarnation of the Second Coming; they called her "Mother Ann," "Ann the Word," "Female Messiah" or "Mother" (a reference to God the Father). According to Ann Lee, the original sin of Adam and Eve – through which all mankind was lost and separated from God – was not an actual bite from a fruit, but the sexual intercourse. Eden is a metaphor for the spiritual and physical state of the first people. The minds and the bodies of Adam and Eve before the fall were perfect, and the riches of Eden symbolize the power the first people had. Furthermore, God warned Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit after the creation of Eve. Genesis says that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was placed in the middle of Eden (Genesis 2:9), as the sexual organs are positioned in the middle of the human body. God allowed the first people to use all their powers (to eat from all trees), with the exception of the power of procreation (not to eat from the tree of the knowledge). After Adam and Eve bit the infamous fruit (they had sexual relations), they hid their nakedness because their organs were bearing the signs of devirgination. Later, Jesus Christ was born by a virgin, Mary, through the action of the Holy Spirit, and not through sexual relations. Likewise, Jesus was neither married nor had sexual relations during his life. So, the pleasure of the flesh (of sex) is the root of all evil. [780]

In essence, the First Great Awakening was an attempt to revive Winthrop's ideal: the establishment of a religious community that had to serve as a model for the nations of the world and to precede the Millennium. The awakening revived the idea that America has a special role in God's plans for the world. The building of the American Jerusalem was, however, a matter of choice. Despite the deterministic Calvinism preached by the revivalists, at the end of the awakening the responsibility of redemption was taken from God's hands and placed on man's shoulders. The image of a gradual apocalyptic scenario, fulfilled rather through man's actions (postmillenarism), was more and more preferred at the expense of an abrupt end, fulfilled only through God's will (premillenarism). America had a prophetic purpose, but the settlers – like the Israelites in the desert – had to struggle in order to turn it into a new Holy Land. [781]

3.1. THE APOCALYPTICISM OF THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

At first, the American colonies were only extensions of the European powers. The rules of cohabitation and administration on the new continent were dictated by the crowns of Europe. And, like on the old continent, in America people were paying taxes for supporting kings and queens. But after two centuries of colonization the two shores of the Atlantic came to be very different from a cultural point of view. America had way more resources compared to the rusty Europe, the religious fanatics were demanding a clear delimitation between the redeemed and the damned, and the people born in America felt no connection to Europe. At the beginning of the 18th century America was no longer populated by European colonists and an invading European culture, but by Americans and an independent American culture. So, the problem was not *if* , but *when* a movement of independence was going to burst.

The American War of Independence (or the American Revolution) took place between 1775 and 1783 and covered the eastern and northeastern parts of the United States and the southeastern part of Canada. The war was fought between Great Britain and 13 British colonies in North America. On July 4, 1776, these colonies proclaimed their independence and formed the state union called the "United States of America."

It is not clear if the American War of Independence was a direct product of the First Great Awakening or not. Joseph Tracy, the preacher and the historian who coined the expression "Great Awakening," depicted the phenomenon as a precursor to the war. [782] Because the events are separated by approximately 30 years, the awakening is usually seen as having a major role, but not a decisive one, in the triggering of the revolution. The First Great Awakening strengthened the sense of belonging among the settlers, created a collective identity and contributed to the development of American democracy. Likewise, the American Revolution fused the religious beliefs and political claims against England and gave a new meaning to the concept of freedom. During the conflict, the religious discourse emphasized the so-called "theology of the covenant" – the idea that America was at the core of God's work and its inhabitants were the new Israel. [783] The struggle against the British Empire was not only a political one, on the right to impose taxes in the colonies, but also a religious one, decisive for the future of America and of the entire world. Despite the predeterministic Calvinism promoted during the First Great Awakening, postmillenarism gained momentum in the region of New England. The reaffirmation of the free will put an enormous pressure on the shoulders of the Americans. As the Israelites failed in their mission to become the spiritual core of the world, in the same way the Americans could miss their chance to become the new chosen people. They had to decide if they would continue alongside the British beast or they would build the new Zion on their own. God offered them the conditions to fight and prosper, but it was their choice if they assumed this responsibility or not. The Millennium was a target that could be reached through the work of both sides, people and God, and not solely through the all-powerful will of the latter.

Europe was dominated by the hierarchical mindset: titles and the position on the social ladder were as valuable as gold. The secular writers of the Enlightenment considered that freedoms are based on a balance of power divided between kings, elites and crowd, and social stability requires respect for the privileged classes. The "divine right of the kings" empowered the royal ruler to treat the land and the people as his personal objects, which can be transmitted to his children. America, however, was a new land that demanded new ideas. The traditional social stratification was challenged through the preaching of the biblical concept of equality between people

regardless of social status, race or moral skills. The corrupt, unequal, materialistic and acquisitive Old World dominated by the Papacy was repudiated. [784] Benjamin Franklin, an ardent supporter of the evangelical movement, embraced egalitarian democracy, while revivalists such as George Whitefield were the fiercest defenders of religious freedom. There was the feeling that America must be different and exemplary, but in the sense that the world had to adapt to America, not vice versa. This feeling acted as a driving force behind the revolutionary concepts of republicanism – the belief that the sovereignty belongs to the people, and not to a hereditary ruling class – and American exceptionalism – the belief that America and the American people hold a special place in God's plans for the world. [785]

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* openly expressed for the first time the idea that America was not an extension of Europe, but a new land, with riches and opportunities that greatly surpass the ones of the Old World. Published anonymously in January 1776, Paine's work enjoyed immediate success. [786] The historian Gordon Wood described *Common Sense* as the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire revolutionary age. [787] Compared to the number of settlers of the time, *Common Sense* has been the best-selling pamphlet in American history. At a moment when the independence was still an undecided issue, *Common Sense* argued in its favor by exaggerating its importance:

> *The sun never shone on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent – of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. [788]*

Paine wrote and argued in a style accessible to the common people. By avoiding philosophy and the Latin references used by the writers of the Enlightenment, he structured his pamphlet as a sermon and used the biblical quotations to reach the hearts of the many.

The Americans in fact found themselves facing some of the dilemmas of the English Civil War regarding the political and social structure. Paine was aware of Cromwell's failed republican experiment and admitted that

monarchy was the first form of government both from a biblical and historical point of view. Yet, through the Creation all men are equal, which makes the distinction between kings and their subjects false. The British have a king because they copied the model of the Israelites, who in turn took the example of the nearby pagan nations (1 Samuel 8). Paine and the American preachers emphasized the contrast between the luxury of the "royal brute" and the poverty of the common British people, in opposition with the uniformity of wealth present in the New World. While the Puritans invested their surplus in books and culture, the Englishmen were forced to unconditionally feed the devilish luxury of the monarchs. Paul the Apostle does not speak about absolute and blind obedience; on the contrary, the opposition against a corrupt government is legitimate. The republican values create the social status similar to the early Church, within which all have equal wealth, and so kings and monarchies are but factors of instability. [789]

Another argument against the British rule was the fact that the New World was discovered shortly before the Protestant Reformation. In this way God offered a safe haven against any kind of persecution. England and Anglicanism managed to keep a distance in relation to Catholicism due to the maritime isolation offered by the English Channel. Likewise, the Atlantic Ocean was an extremely efficient natural obstacle against any claim from the opposite shore. So, the American Revolution marked not only the political separation, but also the religious separation between America and Europe. Until the 16th century Christian eschatology had only one source: Europe. But through the First Great Awakening and the War of Independence America claimed its own religious status, with its own prophetic and messianic movements. From now on Christian eschatology split into two distinct branches: European and American.

4. THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

Around the year 1800, in the period following the War of Independence, American society experienced the Second Great Awakening (1800-1840). This phenomenon was the natural consequence of the fact that the Americans gained their freedom. Winthrop's ideal set in motion the process of formation of the American nation and generated the First Great Awakening. The latter defined the American identity and it generated the American Revolution. Now, with the British problem solved and its destiny taken into its own hands, America had to materialize Winthrop's ideal. Unlike the First Great Awakening – which aimed to emphasize America's extraordinary destiny – the Second Great Awakening focused on creating a utopian society.

The success of the war gave rise to optimism and euphoria in American society; the establishment of the Millennium seemed close. But there was no consensus regarding how this would happen: some expected God's miraculous intervention in history and tried to determine the exact moment through calculations, others thought that Christ would come only after America would be entirely Christianized and raised to a certain level of piety, while others lived under the impression that in the Kingdom of God there is room only for the select groups they were part of. Regardless of expectations, all agreed that the American land was a pure material framework which demanded an equally pure form of worship.

During the First Great Awakening the preachers had to extensively travel in order to find those in spiritual need. Given that the only means of transportation was the horse and the people were scattered on the frontier, spreading the gospel was a difficult and dangerous task. The Second Great Awakening solved this inconvenience by bringing the people to preachers in camp meetings. Practiced mainly by Baptists and Methodists, these were outdoor events, half religious, half social, which brought together settlers from a wide area. They usually lasted two days. Sheltered in tents or covered carts, the crowd – which sometimes numbered tens of thousands [790]– had the possibility of listening to the continuous flow of sermons, to socialize or to exchange opinions about various things.

The New York area contained the highest density of preachers and revivalistic movements; the preacher Charles Grandison Finney called it the "burned-over district." Through this expression Finney aimed to show that this area had been so heavily evangelized that it had no "fuel" (unconverted population) left over to be "burned" (converted). [791] Peter Cartwright, a Methodist preacher, was active in three states and personally baptized around 12,000 people. Asahel Nettleton, a pastor from Connecticut, was even more efficient: he converted around 30,000 people in his entire career. His preaching, inclined toward practical things, was highly successful, but he had a weird approach: he used to study the spiritual condition of the site for a couple of weeks or even months before starting a religious revival. [792] But the uncontested champion of the crowds was the eccentric Lorenzo Dow. He was a bad imitation of John the Baptist: he was weak, poorly fed, his hair seemed like it had never seen a comb and it was said that he had never washed. His only belongings were his clothes and a box with Bibles. He preached anywhere he could gather a crowd, both in America and in England. He loved to appear unexpectedly at public events, loudly announcing that exactly after a year from that moment he would preach in that place. He never disappointed his audience and the multitudes were eager to see him in action: he shouted, screamed, cried, begged, insulted, made jokes, told stories or challenged the people's beliefs. Opposition never discouraged him; if he was not welcome in one place, he simply left toward the next settlement and preached the same sermon again. [793]

The Second Great Awakening was full of madmen, heralds of doom, apostles of progress, prophets, Seventh Day Baptists, Quakers, abolitionists and Calvinists who estimated the coming of the Millennium. In New York, Asa Wild of Amsterdam claimed that he had spoken with the great Jehovah, who had told him that a third of the current population would accede to the Kingdom of God. On the Ohio River, a certain John Dilks prophesied the Millennium for the year 1832. Reverend Robert Reid from Erie, Pennsylvania, expected it in 1895. [794] Or Harriet Livermore of Concord, New Hampshire, saw in Native Americans the Ten Lost Tribes and attempted to convert them to Christianity before the alleged coming of Christ in 1847. [795]

Although premillenarism was losing ground in favor of postmillenarism, the theological effort of David Nevins Lord was remarkable. This Calvinist

systematized the biblical hermeneutics up to a point never attempted before and established a consensus regarding the standard of prophetic analysis. Lord's suggestions include a careful distinction between the prophecies of the language, which must comply with the laws of language and grammar, and symbolic prophecies, which are, with few exceptions, revealed to the prophet in visions and dreams and are all in past tense. After he had identified and analyzed 400 biblical symbols, he concluded that his method, if used correctly, can end the postmillenarist interpretations. An adherent of Protestant historicism, Lord bluntly stated that mankind would not be saved under the current covenant. Rather, mankind lives in an age of trial within which the individuals are forced to choose between good and evil. In this context, the phenomenon of the Second Great Awakening was a sort of bad joke. Throughout history there had been many spiritual awakenings, each time followed by periods of decline and trouble, and so on indefinitely. The postmillenarist optimism was therefore temporary and false. The purpose of the present era is to prepare the people for the next era, the Millennium, when the world would be saved in its entirety. [796]

Neither the premillenarists nor the postmillenarists developed coherent and clearly delimited systems of ideas. But the two millennial perspectives differently influenced the relations between the groups and the rest of society. Premillenarism urged to isolation from the decayed society and to continuous expectation; Christ may come at any moment. On the contrary, postmillenarism manifested itself through activism, integration and the desire to change the world from within. God's Kingdom is "here and now" by implementing the ideals of Jesus in everyday life. In fact, it can be said that the American Revolution and American exceptionalism made a sort of *translatio imperii* : after Otto I had saved Daniel's prophecy by transferring the Roman spirit to his empire, now it was America's turn to become the fulfillment of the prophecy from Nebuchadnezzar's dream. In Europe, Napoleon took the image of the Beast that hated and devoured the Whore of Babylon, the Papacy. On the other side of the Atlantic, the American Empire, the champion of liberty and republican government, became the "stone cut out without hands" that destroyed the "image of clay and iron" and became the "mountain that filled the whole earth." [797]

But American exceptionalism also had a dark side, especially when it was

interpreted in relation to “Manifest Destiny” – a concept which says that the Anglo-Saxon race has the sacred mission to promote and defend democracy in the entire world and to expand across North America. Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism were used to legitimate the expansions toward the West Coast to the detriment of the natives and to justify the war with Mexico regarding the State of Texas in the 1840s. [798]

Another undesirable effect of the exceptionalism was paranoia. While the visible and exterior enemy, Great Britain, was defeated, the Second Great Awakening created the hysteria of the invisible enemy, which comes out right from among the American people. Even before the revolution the Americans had paranoid feelings regarding intruders, spies or agents of Satan who aimed to undermine their sacred mission. But now Cotton Mather’s witches turned into Jews, the Illuminati or Freemasons whose sole purpose in life was to harm the Americans and overthrow the American ideals. This was the beginning of the apocalyptic conspiracy theories, in which the Antichrist has the form of a subversive agent, who rises from within society and acts behind the curtain through secret agents. [799]

While the First Great Awakening was credited with a role in creating the republic, the Second Great Awakening helped the rise of Jacksonian democracy and prepared the stage for the Civil War. Against all odds, the Americans defeated the most powerful empire of the world, just like the Israelites repeatedly defeated overwhelming enemy armies. The new American nation freed itself from the “Egyptian” bondage, but now it had to pass the test of the “desert.” For the Millennial Kingdom to be established, social diseases such as slavery, poverty, prostitution, domestic violence, alcoholism and gender inequality had to be eradicated. The first missionary women of America and women’s suffrage were the products of the egalitarianism of the Second Great Awakening. Likewise, in this period temperance societies were established; all demanded the government to reduce alcohol production or ban alcohol consumption, although it was known that the substance can be used for beneficial purposes as well. [800]

By far the greatest challenge of the Second Great Awakening was slavery, which revealed America’s duplicitous attitude. Monarchy and slavery are very similar institutions: they both have as defining element the tyrannical

relationship between a leader and his subjects. America happily rejected the monarchical system, but it was not thrilled at all to abolish slavery. This abominable institution brought huge economic benefits. So, depending on interests, the religious views regarding slavery varied regionally, with preachers in the South defending it and pastors in the North arguing against it.

Throughout history biblical passages on the use and regulation of slavery have been used as justification for the keeping of slaves. In addition, slavery has existed in all ages and all civilizations, advanced or primitive; this was believed to be the natural order of things. Slave owners often resisted the conversion of slaves to Christianity, fearing that spiritual equality would be followed by a movement of civil equality. One pro-slavery argument stated that, as in the case of Native Americans, the Negroes do not have soul. Another argument said that they do have a soul, but the people with dark-colored skin are the progenies of Cain, who was punished by God with a corporal mark after he killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:15). And another argument said that they are the descendants of Ham, [801] Canaan's father, who was cursed by Noah to perpetual slavery (Genesis 9:25).

Despite opposition, the Methodists, the Baptists and the Presbyterians absorbed the largest number of black slaves. After they freed them and helped them organize themselves in religious groups, new congregations were established especially in the states of South Carolina and Virginia. [802] John Wesley, unlike his friend George Whitefield who supported slavery, said that "liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air. And no human law can deprive him of that right, which he derives from the law of nature." [803] Thus, at the beginning of the Second Great Awakening the American Methodists made anti-slavery sentiments a condition of church membership, on the ground that the institution of slavery contradicted their strict morality. [804] The famous English preacher Charles Spurgeon named slavery "the foulest blot that ever stained a national escutcheon, and may have to be washed out in blood." [805] Harriet Beecher Stowe, the daughter of the preacher Lyman Beecher, wrote the famous novel *Uncle's Tom Cabin* as a protest against slavery. In the conclusions of the 1852 edition Stowe argued that a slave-owning America is an America that failed from its divine purpose and it would bear God's terrible judgment:

If this persecuted race, with every discouragement and disadvantage, have done thus much, how much more they might do, if the Christian church would act toward them in the spirit of her Lord! This is an age of the world when nations are trembling and convulsed. A mighty influence is abroad, surging and heaving the world, as with an earthquake. And is America safe? Every nation that carries in its bosom great and unredressed injustice has in it elements of this last convulsion. ... O Church of Christ, read the signs of the times! ... Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the Christian church has a heavy account to answer. [806]

On the other hand, the Christian God is a god of the oppressed, poor and in need. It was easy and rather tempting for a slave convert to interpret the apocalyptic concepts in his favor and against the tyrannical white men. [807] In 1831, in the State of Virginia, Nat Turner became convinced that he was a messenger of the latter days and he led a rebellion that killed 60 white people. [808]

4.1. THE BURST OF UTOPIAN EXPERIMENTS

The Second Great Awakening was the golden age of utopianism. Driven by the belief that they act on God's command, the religious fanatics established utopian communities within which they denied blood ties in favor of belief ties. However, these projects proved to be rather a reason for exploiting people by other people than the godly communities initially conceived. Moreover, utopianism was never envisioned as democracy, but as communism. The European monarchical system of social inequality was collapsing and thus people experimented with other forms of political and social organization. Their natural tendency was to head toward the other extreme, of absolute equality. Thus, while Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels supported communist ideology on rationalistic grounds, the religious fanatics used biblical arguments.

Started in 1804 in Pennsylvania, the community of the self-entitled German prophet Johann George Rapp was one of the most remarkable utopian experiments in the history of America. Due to persecutions, the French Revolution, the spreading of atheism and Napoleon's ominous rise, 650 Rappists – of the approximately 10,000 – left the tumultuous and decadent

Europe for an American odyssey that lasted 100 years. They called their community “Harmony” – a reference to the relation between God and man that, after the establishment of the Millennium, would be restored to its Edenic condition. [809]

The Rappists practiced pacifism, did not enroll in the army and rejected infant baptism and oaths. The communal lifestyle was adopted in 1805 according to Acts 4:32-37 and the work *Christianopolis* (1619) of the mystic Johannes Valentinus Andreae. Everything was shared, the members owned nothing individually. In 1807 they stopped using tobacco and adopted celibacy – considered morally superior to marriage – as a way of purification. The married members practiced abstinence; George and Christine Rapp abstained from sex since 1786. According to Rapp, God initially created man with complete sexual organs, with the possibility to create progenies without the help of a woman. Adam, however, became dissatisfied, so God separated from his body the feminine side. And when the feminine portion was separated from Adam to form Eve, disharmony followed. Nevertheless, anyone can regain harmony through the practice of celibacy, which is one and the same with the denial of sexuality. [810]

Through hard work, iron discipline and superhuman economization, Harmony came to be self-sufficient and make profit in only five years. By supporting a large variety of manufacturers, trade and agriculture, the Rappists prospered both economically and spiritually. Gathering material revenues was not at all in contradiction with their millenarist beliefs. On the contrary; the resources were aimed to ensure the necessary financial force for the reform of the entire society at Christ’s coming.

In the next decades the Rappists moved twice and every time they managed to build prosperous societies. In 1814 they sold Harmony to a group of Mennonites willing to implement their own utopian ambitions and they moved to Indiana, where they built New Harmony. And in 1824 they moved back in Pennsylvania, where they established the community of “Economy.” With an income per person ten times higher than the average of the State of Indiana, the Rappists came to lend money to the authorities. Their fortune, estimated at a half a million dollars in gold, was destined for the reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem at the beginning of the

Millennium. [811]

Over the years the Rappists suffered schisms that led to the formation of new utopian communities. Despite the appearances of equality and respect, the real relationship between Rapp and his followers was rather like that between a landowner and his slaves. Not all the Rappists who migrated from Germany joined the main community; disappointed by the adoption of the communal way of life, the immigrants from the ship *Margaret* formed an association based on private property with a fund destined to those in need. Led by Frederick Conrad Haller, these schismatics established a separate colony in Blooming Grove, New York. [812]

The second schism occurred in 1829, when the community was visited by the impostor and megalomaniac Bernhard Müller. He had entitled himself as "Count de Leon," "Archduke Maximilian von Este," "Lion of Judah" or "King David's descendant." He and his few followers were, allegedly, the true Philadelphians, but before he opened the seven seals of the Apocalypse the chosen ones had to be gathered in a safe place. After he was arrested and released under the condition of leaving Bavaria, the Rappists invited him to join them. Count Leon entered Economy in October 1831 as a true king: in a chaise, accompanied by 40 followers, dressed in uniform with epaulets and swords. The reception was enthusiastic, but short-lived. In a couple of months Economy became tormented by the clashes between the old master and this stubborn intruder. The differences of opinion regarding celibacy caused a schism that claimed a third of Economy's money and manpower in favor of Müller.

Despite the loss of money and people, the Rappists continued to work and enjoy material success. Rapp lived 90 years, until 1848, never abandoning the belief that the Second Coming would occur during his lifetime. However, due to the failed prophecies, the practice of celibacy, the simple life and strict proselytism, the community formally dissolved in 1905, exactly 100 years from its foundation. [813]

After they left Economy, Bernhard Müller and his approximately 250 followers established the utopian community Löwenburg ("Lion City"), near Phillipsburg. On July 25, 1833, he proclaimed the laws of the Millennium, with himself as God's anointed over the tribe of Judah. Only 54 members

signed this hilarious proclamation and accepted Müller's title. But due to financial problems and the pressures exercised by Rapp, the group had to relocate to Grand Encore, Louisiana. Here they established a new colony, but an epidemic of yellow fever killed lots of colonists, including Müller. Those who survived continued to believe that the beloved leader would one day return to judge the world, but the group finally dissolved in 1871. [814]

The scientific utopian experiments went side by side with the religious ones, but all of them were short-lived and failed miserably. In 1843 the abolitionist John Collins established his own utopia on a farmland near Skaneateles, New York. Although it was economically viable, the internal differences and the decline of Collins's authority resulted in the dissolution of the community after only three years. [815] The socialist Étienne Cabet founded the movement of the Icarians, which led to the formation of five communal communities in the United States. [816] The French philosopher Charles Fourier elaborated the theory of the *phalanstery* , with communities that grow in stages toward an absolute communal way of life. His visions directly inspired the establishment of at least four utopian communities on American soil. Both Cabet and Fourier influenced Robert Owen, a magnate of textiles, who bought New Harmony from the Rappists and started his own series of utopias. Owen, who was an atheist and philanthropist, experimented on his own employees to prove his theory that human beings are only the product of the environment in which they live. In order to improve the condition of his subjects, he founded schools for the children of his employees, reduced the work hours, raised the minimum age for work and never cut from salaries, even when the company was passing through hard times. The utopian experiment in New Harmony lasted only two and a half years, until 1827. [817] And in 1825 the writer Frances "Fanny" Wright, influenced by Owen, founded the utopian experiment of Nashoba, in Tennessee, aiming to prepare the black slaves for emancipation. It lasted only three years. [818]

A religious copy of New Harmony came into being in 1817 in Zoar, Ohio. The Zoarites migrated from the German regions to escape persecution and to search for freedom of expression. The name "Zoar" was taken from one of the five cities that avoided the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14:8). The Zoarites rejected baptism and religious holidays, except the Sabbath, did not vote and did not participate in the political life. According to the

declaration of a member, their supreme goal was to redeem themselves and to offer an example to the entire world:

> *Our object is to get into heaven, and help others to get there. ... I formerly believed [our system] would spread all over the world. I thought every body would come into Communistic relations. I believe so still, but I don't know how far our particular system will prevail. In heaven there is only Communism;* [819]

But no social or religious experiment can be compared with the one from Oneida. While Ann Lee or George Rapp taught their followers that sex is a deadly sin, John Humphrey Noyes encouraged the practice of sex as the ultimate way of glorifying God. The stark contrast between the visionaries who populated the awakenings says a lot about American religiosity.

After he adopted preterism in 1834, Noyes declared himself to be full of Holy Spirit and free from sin, and everything that he was going to do ever since was sinless because it came from a perfect heart. [820] He gathered a handful of followers and established a utopian community at Putney, Vermont. Complex marriage started to be practiced in 1844 and the communal way of life was adopted two years later. The Noyesites came to share among themselves absolutely everything, including their partners of marriage. Monogamous marriage was replaced by pantagamy – every man was married to every woman and vice versa. [821] For Noyes and his followers sex was a purifying activity carefully supervised and regulated. But in the eyes of the outsiders their practices seemed like a resumption of the Roman Bacchanalia. In 1847, threatened with arrest for adultery and sexual immorality, they left Putney and headed toward the "burned-over district" of New York. At Oneida they acquired 40 acres of land and they established a utopian community based on preterism, communism and complex marriage. If a man, said Noyes, seeks the pleasure of his partner and not his own, then that man is capable of freeing himself from the sin of selfishness. Man has to learn to control his body and his selfish passions, or else he is a threat to the welfare of the others. So, complex marriage allowed all the men of the community to "marry" (by turn) any woman, and all the women to marry any man. The only condition was mutual consent. Unwanted pregnancies were avoided as much as possible. To this effect, the elders were religious models and sexual

instructors for the youngsters. Women at menopause were encouraged to introduce the young men in the secrets of controlled sex, while the older men had the same obligation regarding the young women. Basically, it was a form of prostitution legitimated by religious fallacies. Tirzah Miller, Noyes's niece, described in detail in her journal the sexual experiences she had had with the other members, including her uncle. And from the perspective of an impartial observer Tirzah's euphoric confessions rather picture a terrifying orgy in continuous form than an activity of religious worship. [822]

Noyes tried to implement a form of eugenics based on an assumed spiritual heredity. "Stirpiculture" was a selective program of reproduction through which the community aimed to create an improved race of babies. The members who desired to become parents had to pass through a series of examinations, after which, based on the results, a committee was coupling them with the best partners. The experiment produced 58 children, nine of them being fathered by Noyes. The fundamental idea of stirpiculture was that the learned moral skills would be transmitted from parents to children, and the latter would progress even more in morality and purity. When the children were being weaned from mother's milk, they were placed in a separate area and raised in a communal style. Their parents could visit them, but they were not allowed to become too close. [823]

The system of mutual criticism was another unique feature of the Oneida experiment. Each member had to come in front of the community in order to be subjected to criticism during a general meeting. The purpose was correction, not punishment. A rotating committee of four members evaluated by turn the qualities and the defects of all the others. The committee was replaced every three months, so that everyone could be both criticized and critic. It was a tough process, but appreciated by most of the members because it was helping them improve themselves. [824]

The Oneida Community survived until Noyes tried to pass the leadership of the community to his son Theodore, an atheist. Under the pressure of an arrest for statutory rape and the risk of an open revolt, in June 1879 Noyes ran to Niagara Falls, Ontario, never to return. Noyes's departure was immediately followed by collapse: some members began to fight for the leadership, while others openly contested various practices. As a result, most

of them left the community, abandoned complex marriage and normalized their married status. Only a few remained and reorganized the community as a purely economic joint-stock company. [825]

The overwhelming majority of the utopian experiments eventually dissolved, both due to internal circumstances – failed prophecies, revolts, schisms or the attrition of doctrines – and external circumstances – rapid industrialization and scientific development. At the moment, the Hutterite, Amish and Mennonite colonies are a living example of the utopian experimentation. It is true that these groups have their roots in 16th-century Anabaptists and the Radical Reformation, but the guiding lines are largely the same: isolation and the practice of a pure lifestyle. However, the concept of purity seems to be very malleable. For example, the Amish community chose to live in the conditions of the 17th century, rejecting or limiting all the subsequent technological innovations, including electricity. These are, allegedly, corrupt and they encourage the commission of sins. Likewise, the Hutterites use the products of the "decayed" society only in work purposes. In other words, science is used when it helps the doctrine and the community, and it is rejected when it becomes a threat to the unity of the group. But there is no theological support for accepting a certain degree of material progress as coming from God and rejecting the subsequent degrees of progress as coming from the devil. The candle used by the Amish is as pure or impure as the light bulb. In the 15th century the Catholic Church condemned the printing press because it made the Bible available to everyone; then, in the 17th century, when the Amish communities were forming, the Adamites condemned the loom as the work of Satan and demanded a return to the Adamic innocence and the living without clothes. These examples show that the religious fanatics refuse or they are not capable of seeing that the laws of nature are morally neutral, and only their usage in one way or another can be categorized as evil or good. Hence, the utopias that promote a so-called return to a state of innocence or the isolation in a certain degree of knowledge are false utopias, because there is nothing ideal or holy in ignorance, stupidity or in being at the mercy of the Universe.

4.2. JOSEPH SMITH JR. AND MORMONISM

It is no secret that religious fanaticism is a relative of idiocy. But Mormon

theology – based on the life, the experience and the teachings of Joseph Smith Jr. – defies history and insults common sense; nobody has ever succeeded to form a cult based on historical and religious fabrications of such magnitude.

Smith spent his adolescence at Palmyra, in a poor family of farmers in the west of the "burned-over district." The young Smith did not join any religious community, but he intensely studied the Bible and he was influenced by the folk religion (local ethnic) practiced by his parents. In 1820 this 14-year-old boy became obsessed with the issue of spiritual salvation. Confused, he decided that it was best to seek divine help. One day he went in one of the nearby forests and began to pray passionately. According to his own account, there he experienced what it is now known as the "First Vision": he felt that he was overwhelmed by an invisible malefic force, but at the last moment two radiant beings appeared in front of him. One of these beings told Smith not to join any of the existing churches because all of them had faulty doctrines and he was to wait until further instructions would be given to him. [826]

There are several versions of this experience and it was not made public until the 1840s, being practically unknown to the first Mormons. In addition, theophanies such as this and false prophecies were common during the awakening. [827]

After the First Vision the young Smith was paid to act as a seer in treasure hunting. He used "prophetic stones" in unsuccessful attempts to locate lost things or buried treasures. [828] The colonists saw America in the same way the crusaders had seen Palestine: a land full of miracles, artifacts and riches. They believed that in America they are closer to God and they searched for material and spiritual evidence to confirm their feelings. This was the climate on December 21, 1823, when Smith, yet again according only to his own account, was visited by the angel Moroni. [829] Moroni directed Smith on a hill close to his house and told him to unearth a golden manuscript (plates) which contained a detailed recording of the first inhabitants of America, the ancient Israelites. Near the golden manuscript there were also a breastplate and two prophetic stones (Smith named them "Urim" and "Thummim"). [830] Allegedly, only four years later, on September 22, 1827, the angel allowed him to take the artifacts into possession.

At the beginning of 1827 treasure hunting brought Smith in Harmony, the former location of the Rappists. Here he met Emma, whom he married. [831] Initially, Smith told only a few family members and close friends that he had received the unusual artifacts. His friend Martin Harris, a delirious pseudo-prophet, was immediately convinced that the golden plates were real. He offered himself to be Smith's scribe, while the latter was translating them through a strange (in fact inexplicable) procedure of examining the prophetic stones Urim and Thummim. From April 1828 until June Smith and Harris constantly worked at the translation of the golden plates. From September 1828 the work was continued with Emma, and from April 1829 until June with Oliver Cowdery, a school teacher whose family had also been engaged in treasure hunting and magical practices. Later, both Cowdery and Smith swore that during the work of translation they had been personally ordained by the ghost of John the Baptist and after that they baptized each other in the Susquehanna River. [832]

According to Smith, the manuscript received from the angel Moroni was formed of very thin, engraved golden plates which, taken as a whole, formed a book of approximately six inches long (15 cm) by six inches wide by six inches thick, tied together with rings. The characters engraved on the plates were written in a language that resembled Egyptian (Smith named it "reformed Egyptian"). The complete translation of the golden plates resulted in a work of 116 pages that was supposed to revolutionize Christianity. According to the information from the plates, when the languages were confounded by God at the Tower of Babel, a group of people known as "Jaredites" migrated to the American continent. Although they built a flourishing empire, centuries later the Jaredites self-destructed in a massive civil war. Almost two million people died in a single battle on the hill Cumorah. While the Jaredites exterminated themselves, in the year 600 BC, just before the Babylonian captivity, a family of Jews from Jerusalem migrated to America. The father of this family was called "Lehi." Lehi had a wife and several sons and daughters. Nephi, an obedient son of Lehi, was the father of a race of white people known as "Nephites," while Laman, a rebel son of Lehi, was the father of the "Lamanites," cursed with dark sin due to their rebellious nature. The two nations (races) were in constant conflict with each other. But in the year 34 AD Jesus Christ descended from heaven (right after his ascension in Jerusalem) in America, visiting the Nephites and the

Lamanites. This event brought a total Christianization of the two nations and centuries of peace. Nevertheless, the conflict was reignited, and the hill Cumorah was once again the witness of a huge massacre. The Lamanites destroyed the Nephites, until there was only one left, Moroni. So, the native people of America are in fact the descendants of the Lamanite people, and the stone ruins that are spread across the continent are former cities of the civilizations described in the golden plates. Fourteen centuries after the destruction of the Nephites by the Lamanites, the Nephite prophet Moroni appeared in the form of an angel to the young Smith and guided him to find the golden plates. Moroni was a Nephite prophet in his mortal life, the son of the prophet Mormon, the compiler of the buried text. From the author of the golden plates, Mormon, Smith named the translation of the texts as the *Book of Mormon* , and those who adhered to this doctrine have been called "Mormons."

Joseph Smith Jr. and all those who have succeeded him to the leadership of the Mormon group, presidents and prophets alike, have claimed that the *Book of Mormon* is a true description of the history of America. While the Bible is considered to be a historical description of the Old World and of the former Christian Covenant, the *Book of Mormon* is a historical description of the New World and of the new Millennial Covenant. The introductory line of the *Book of Mormon* says that it "is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God's dealings with ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains the fulness of the everlasting gospel." [833] In this context, Columbus, for example, is seen as a man guided by the Holy Spirit to discover America and to fulfill the prophecy of the *Book of Mormon* . [834]

Smith's strategy was simple: he presented a version of the past in order to support a certain scenario of the future. Starting from the sacred history of America contained in the *Book of Mormon* , together with the subsequent visions and signs, Smith built an apocalyptic scenario that has at its core the glorious destiny of the United States and the Mormon group. According to the Mormon doctrine, between the ascension of Christ and the revelation of Moroni there was the great apostasy – a long period populated by false prophets and false doctrines. The pure Christian teaching was corrupted immediately after the death of the apostles. But God began to restore the truth before Parousia; first through the discovery and the colonization of America,

and then through the restoration of the true Church. Jesus's sermon in America gives hope to the Mormons that the Zion of the latter days would be established in the New World. Smith is (self-proclaimed) the one and true prophet of God after the apostles, while the *Book of Mormon* is the everlasting gospel revealed to the people in the last days and preached in the entire world according to Revelation 14:6-7.

In June 1829 Smith and Cowdery moved to Fayette, New York, to preach their doctrine. But, without a solid proof, the two had a problem of credibility; their story was hard to believe. Smith's immediate solution was to name the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses – close friends and relatives who testified and swore that they saw and touched the golden plates.

The Three Witnesses were early Mormon leaders: Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and David Whitmer. The Eight Witnesses were members of the Whitmer and Smith families: Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith senior, Hyrum Smith and Samuel Harrison Smith. Apparently, all these people signed a declaration in which they confirmed that an angel showed them the golden plates translated by Joseph Smith Jr. in the *Book of Mormon* . But the two sets of testimonies are undated and there is no telling when these witnesses actually saw the plates. Smith claimed that after he finished translating the golden plates the angel Moroni took them back. And the *Book of Mormon* , together with the signed testimonies of the 11 witnesses, was published on March 26, 1830, in Palmyra. [835]

Due to internal struggles and differences of opinion, until 1840 most of these witnesses separated themselves from Smith or they were excommunicated from the church. [836] It is not known if one of them officially retracted the signed testimonies, but Martin Harris claimed in front of his associates that the Eight Witnesses had never seen the plates, but they were persuaded to sign. [837] In any case, since the first publication in 1830 to the present, the signed testimonies of the 11 witnesses were published alongside every edition of the *Book of Mormon* .

On April 6, 1830, the Mormons formally established the Church of Christ (later renamed and restructured as the "Church of the Latter-Day Saints"), and small branches were set in Palmyra, Fayette and Colesville. The names

“Mormon” and “Mormon Church” were initially used only by non-Mormons. This was also the time when the 13 Articles of Faith, the guiding lines of the new sect, were stated. Of these, articles 8 and 10 state:

> *We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God. ... We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.* *[838]*

Six months after its establishment, the Mormon Church sent missionaries to Native Americans, identified in the *Book of Mormon* with the Lamanites. It proved to be a miserable failure.

In July 1831 Smith confessed to his followers that the Zion of the latter days would be established near Missouri (*Doctrine and Covenants* 57:1-3). He sent in the area a group of missionaries led by Oliver Cowdery. In their journey they converted Sidney Rigdon’s group of fanatics. Through conversion, Rigdon’s followers not only doubled the number of Mormons, but they were also manifesting spiritual gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues. Fiery orator, Rigdon was named Smith’s spokesman.

In order to avoid the growing opposition in New York, the church headquarters was set in Kirtland, Ohio, and Smith advised his followers to gather there or in Missouri. After finishing the *Book of Mormon* , Smith rarely used the prophetic stones. Later writings were no longer based on ancient texts, but on supernatural guidance. At the beginning of the 1830s the *Book of Moses* (which includes a long passage about the biblical Enoch) was conceived and there was also an attempt to correct the Bible. Smith corrected even his previous revelations, already treated by his followers as sacred texts. After his death, these texts were gathered together and named *Doctrine and Covenants* .

The eschatological themes of the Mormon discourse suffered numerous adaptations and alterations in order to pardon or to support the ruinous megalomania of the founding prophet. Inspired by Rapp and the utopian

euphoria that swept America, at the beginning of 1831 Smith claimed that God commanded him to organize the social system of the "United Order of Enoch." Under the pretext that this precedes the Millennium, members were urged to donate their wealth to the church. Both at Kirtland and at Independence superhuman efforts were made for the establishment of a communal industrial society. But the utopian experiment was abandoned in less than two years. [839]

In February 1835 Smith prophesied that Orson Hyde would go to Jerusalem and with God's help he would make great things that would facilitate the ingathering of the Jews. Orson Hyde went indeed to Jerusalem, but did nothing to facilitate the ingathering of the Jews. [840]

At Kirtland the Mormons built their first stone temple. Until 1836 this was the scene of visions, angelic visitations, prophecies, speaking in tongues and other unusual spiritual experiences. [841] It was a period of spiritual prosperity that had no reason to be interrupted, but prolonged as much as possible. Consequently, the issue of Parousia took an unexpected, even hilarious turn:

> *I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the coming of the Son of Man, when I heard a voice repeat the following: Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore let this suffice, and trouble me no more on this matter. I was left thus, without being able to decide whether this coming referred to the beginning of the millennium or to some previous appearing, or whether I should die and thus see his face. I believe the coming of the Son of Man will not be any sooner than that time (Doctrine and Covenants 130:14-17).* *[842]*

The inflammatory spirituality from the temple of Kirtland was extinguished by the financial collapse. Both the prophet and his church entered deeply into debt. Desperate for money, in August 1836 it was revealed to Smith that there was much treasure in Salem, Massachusetts. Hoping that he would find it with the help of the prophetic stones, he and his closest associates traveled east. By September they returned with no treasure.

In 1838 the assembly of Kirtland began to fall apart due to the apostasy of its ranks. Aiming for rapid gains, Smith and Rigdon founded a pseudo-bank that

went bankrupt in less than a month due to the financial speculations of the leaders. Previously, Smith urged the Mormons to invest in this financial scheme as a religious obligation. Combined with the bankruptcy of several banks from Ohio, around 300 members became disillusioned, including a third of the important leaders. This resulted in the first major schism of the group. Warren Parish, Smith's former secretary, together with Martin Harris and others excommunicated Smith and Rigdon through the power of knives and fire arms, took the control of the temple and founded a separate organization. [843]

Banished from Kirtland, Smith and Rigdon moved to Far West, Missouri, followed by hundreds of loyal followers. Previously, the outpost of Independence from the State of Missouri, a chaotic village with 20 houses, was the second important Mormon center after Kirtland. In 1830 Oliver Cowdery saw here the location of the New Jerusalem, an idea confirmed by Smith in 1831 (*Doctrine and Covenants* 57:1-3). But Missouri was a state dominated by Catholics, where these heretics were not welcome. So, in 1833 the Mormons of Missouri were forced to leave Independence, seeking refuge in the city of Far West (*Doctrine and Covenants* 115:1-19).

Smith and Rigdon arrived at Far West at the beginning of 1838. To make matters worse, Far West also became the scene of inner struggles; the leaders of the faction of Missouri and four of the early Mormon leaders – David and John Whitmer, William Phelps and Oliver Cowdery – were expelled. [844] Then the Mormon War erupted. Because in only a year the number of Mormons reached almost 6,000, the non-Mormon residents feared that they would lose the political control of the region. In August 1838 a mob agitator started a revolt against the Mormons. The Mormon families were chased away from their farms, and in reply the Mormons set on fire non-Mormon buildings. In October 1838 a Mormon contingent clashed with the Richmond County militia on the Crooked River; three Mormons and a Missourian were killed. A couple of days later a small group of Missourians massacred the Mormon settlement at Haun's Mill. In order to stop the bloodshed, Smith and four associates surrendered to the authorities on November 1, 1838, while the Mormon properties were confiscated. The Mormon leaders had been charged with treason by a court in Richmond, but they were quickly released due to the fact that they were no longer considered a threat. By the summer of 1839

the Mormons were driven out completely from Missouri. [845]

After release, Smith joined his followers who, running from Missouri eastward, were scattered along the banks of the Mississippi River, near Quincy, the State of Illinois. In short time the prophet purchased a land on credit in the north, in Hancock County, which became the new gathering place of the saints. Smith named this place “Nauvoo,” a Hebrew word from Isaiah 52:7 which means “to be beautiful.”

At Nauvoo Mormonism suffered a new transformation through the introduction of the baptism of the dead – an inane attempt to save the past generations who died without the benefit of Mormonism. [846] The source of these fallacies was the *Book of Abraham* . Later it was proved that the so-called *Book of Abraham* had nothing to do with Abraham. In reality, in 1835 Smith bought a manuscript from a traveling mummy exhibition and translated it, without knowing that it was a compilation of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and other Egyptian texts. Nevertheless, the so-called *Book of Abraham* was canonized by the Mormons after Smith’s death. [847]

By 1840 Smith and other prominent Mormons became Freemasons. Due to this fact the ceremonies in Nauvoo were more in number and more elaborate compared to those in Kirtland. In March 1842 Smith became Master Mason and the lodge of Nauvoo was founded. Most of the rituals from the temple, symbols, signs, vocabulary and clothing were copied from Freemasons. [848]

Of all the practices, plural marriage received the most hostile reception. Smith’s harem numbered around 30 wives; of these, two were sisters of his first wife, ten of them were already married to other men, approximately a third were teenagers and two of them were only 14 years old. [849] At first, plural marriage was allowed and secretly practiced only by prominent Mormons. But things got out of control as more and more Mormons were involved in this orgiastic circle. [850] When Smith started to court the wives of William Law and Robert Foster, the two publicly accused him of polygamy and left the cult together with their families. Feeling his authority falter, on May 26, 1844, Smith delivered a speech in front of a large crowd of Mormons in which he categorically denied that he was having more than one wife. [851] But Law purchased a printing press and on the 7th of June he published the pamphlet *Nauvoo Expositor* . Within the four pages he inserted

signed declarations about Smith, who had claimed that every man had the divine privilege of marrying ten virgins, and denounced the false doctrine of multiple gods and the attempt to “Christianize a world by political schemes and intrigue.” [852]

In reply, Smith ordered the Council of Nauvoo and the sheriff to destroy the printing press and all the remaining copies. It was a fatal decision. When the destruction of the pamphlet reached the ears of the journalist Thomas Sharp, his newspaper *Warsaw Signal* launched a hysterical call to the population: “Citizens arise, one and all!!! Can you stand by, and suffer such Infernal Devils! To rob men of their property and rights, without avenging them. We have no time for comment, every man will make his own. Let it be made with Powder and Ball!” [853]

The situation became extremely tense. Smith, fearing for his life, declared martial law on the 18th of June. The governor of Illinois desperately tried to prevent a civil war by mobilizing the state militia. He assured Smith that he would be protected if he came to Carthage to be tried for destroying Law’s pamphlet. Consequently, Smith ordered his men to disarm themselves and he surrendered in Illinois on the 23rd of June together with three other followers. Four days later an armed group of individuals with blackened faces stormed the prison where the Mormons were being held prisoners. Hyrum Smith was shot in the face while he was trying to secure the door. Smith tried to jump out the window (that had no bars) but he was hit by a bullet and fell to the ground, where he was shot multiple times and died. [854]

4.2.1. The subsequent schisms and the truth about the *Book of Mormon*

At a time when the world was crazy about titles and honors, Joseph Smith Jr. held several attributions: prophet, seer, President of the Church, President of the First Presidency and administrator of the church. It was unclear if all these titles and responsibilities were supposed to be inherited by a single person, and it was equally unclear who had to carry this burden. There was no proof that Smith had blessed his elder son, Joseph III, with the intention to succeed him; he was only 11 years old when his father was killed, being too small for a game so big. Samuel Smith, one of the younger brothers of Joseph

Smith Jr., died one month later, and the unstable character of William Smith, another brother of the prophet, prevented him to be a serious contender. [855] So, the most powerful candidates to Smith's succession were James Strang, Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young. All three claimed they were the rightful successors, all three were ready to take the power by any means necessary and all three established rival organizations.

Although he was a fresh convert, James Strang proved to be a worthy opponent. On June 27, 1844, he declared that Smith had appointed him to take the leadership of the church and an angel ordained him as Smith's successor at the exact moment of the prophet's death. He even presented the *Letter of Appointment* – a document allegedly written and sent by Smith to him in June 1, 1844, from Nauvoo. Strang did not manage to take the leadership of the entire organization, but together with a group of schismatics he established the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at Voree, Wisconsin. Among the most prominent followers were four of the 11 witnesses from the *Book of Mormon* , three of the prophet's apostles, a bishop and a couple of members of Smith's family. Almost all repudiated Strang later. [856] Like Smith, Strang had visions, in 1845 he discovered the "Voree Plates," he translated them using Urim and Thummim, he used witnesses to authenticate his findings and he restored ancient spiritual knowledge. The Voree Plates, which were of brass, were the last testament of a certain Rajah Manchou of Vorito, who lived in the area centuries before and wished to leave a short description of his world to posterity. [857] After Strang was shot dead by two former adherents in 1856, [858] most of his followers joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints of Joseph Smith III, the direct surviving descendant of Joseph and Emma Smith.

Sidney Rigdon attempted to acquire the leadership of the Mormons by using supernatural arguments. When he heard about Smith's death he interrupted his mission of proselytism and returned to Nauvoo on August 3, 1844. And, as a surviving senior member of the First Presidency, he declared in front of an assembly that he had received a revelation through which he had been endowed "guardian of the church."

Brigham Young, on the other hand, used political schemes. He returned to Nauvoo from Boston on the 6th of August, and the next day he met Rigdon,

who repeated his claim. In reply, Young said that the leadership of the church became the task of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, whose senior member was himself. [859] Eventually, Rigdon was excommunicated in September 1844; he ran from Nauvoo and founded the Church of Jesus Christ in Pittsburgh. Thus the power was taken by Brigham Young as president of the Quorum and First-President of the church.

Young lacked Smith's charisma, but he compensated through his organizational skills. After the position of the Mormons in Illinois became endangered, they migrated toward the west in search for a new place of residence. The Mormon pioneers began marching from the Missouri River in April 1847 and reached Salt Lake Valley on June 24. This company, numbering 143 men, three women and two children headed by Young, well-armed and disciplined, managed to complete the 1,400 miles journey without suffering a single fatality. A couple of days after the arrival they put the foundations of the first houses that would form the core of Salt Lake City. In March 1849 they founded the government of the State of Deseret and petitioned the Congress to be admitted in the union. "Deseret" is a word from the *Book of Mormon* meaning "honey bee." [860] But the Congress rejected their request and organized the territory of Utah, named like this after a local tribe of Amerindians. Utah is the place where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the largest branch of Mormonism, has thrived. [861]

The fragmentation of Mormonism, however, continued even after the establishment in Utah. In 1857 the Mormons of Utah committed a massacre on Mount Meadows, in which 120 non-Mormon migrants, including women and children, were killed. This event disillusioned many of Young's followers, leading to the formation of several schisms and small vagrant groups.

Joseph Morris claimed he had been appointed the seventh angel of the Apocalypse and together with a couple of hundred Mormons he established the Church of the Firstborn at Kingston Fort, Utah. "Praying Joe," as he was nicknamed, told his adherents that the Second Coming was imminent and that they should not cultivate the land. Due to starvation and failed prophecies, the Morrisite ranks began to fall apart. In June 1862 Morris was killed in a skirmish between the local militia and the Morrisites.

All the Morrisites were pardoned three days after they were convicted. Most of them gathered in Deer Lodge County, Montana, under the leadership of George Williams (known as the “Prophet Cainan”). On January 6, 1879, after he had divine revelations, Williams proclaimed Deer Lodge the place where Christ would descend. And, like Smith and Strang, he also published *St. Ann’s Hill Record* , an alleged translation of ancient archives. [862]

In 1855 the fanatic William Davies converted to Mormonism and migrated to America in Utah. A series of subsequent revelations determined him to establish the sect Kingdom of Heaven in Walla Walla, Washington. Davies pretended that he was the incarnation of Michael the Archangel and the reincarnation of Adam, Abraham and David. In February 1868 Mrs. Davies gave birth to Arthur Davies, identified by his delusional father with the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. The second son, born in the next year, was declared “God the Father,” while William Davies assumed the role of the Holy Spirit. Curiously, Mrs. Davies got no title within this godly family although even the followers were positioned in a hierarchy of angels and saints. Grover Andrews, William Davies’s right hand kept his long reddish-brown hair in curls that hung to his waist to imitate the classic angelic appearances; and because he was responsible for discipline and had a penchant for fighting he was dubbed the “Destroying Angel.” The Daviesians collapsed in 1880, when Davies’s children died of diphtheria and a series of lawsuits brought them to bankruptcy. [863]

Arnold Potter, high priest and member of the Seventy had a cruel fate as well. In 1856, while he was on a mission of proselytism in Australia, the spirit of Jesus Christ entered his body. He became “Potter Christ-The Living God-Morning Star” – a title he wrote on his forehead alongside a cross and a star. In Australia Potter wrote a book dictated by angels in which he described the development of the Last Judgment. He returned to California in 1857, and until 1861 he gathered adherents with the intention to establish near Independence, Missouri, the traditional place of the Mormon Zion. At Council Bluffs, Iowa, the wandering Potterists became a local curiosity. The leader was wearing a long white robe, while the adherents were dressed in black robes. They held energetic prayer meetings, at the end of which Potter was announcing new revelations from God. In 1872 Potter rode a donkey to the edge of a cliff and jumped to “ascend to Heaven.” Instead, he died

crashing on the rocks. [864]

Despite the numerous alterations and adaptations of the Mormon beliefs, the prestige of the main Mormon church remained intact. In the 21st century Brigham Young's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints counts around 15 million members worldwide. The Golgothic beginnings and the rapid growth of the movement are aspects that, in the eyes of the Mormons at least, confirm the special destiny of Mormonism. In reality, popularity is not a sign of divine favors, as any member of a group prefers to interpret it, but the manifestation of chance and a reflection of the low level of culture of the population. Dozens of sects and religious organizations came into being during the awakenings. If any of these had survived the trial of history, they would have pretended that they had a special destiny.

At the time of the Second Great Awakening the American nation was a nation without history. And a nation without history is like a man without an identity. So, Smith forged a history for the American continent, a history which conveniently conferred divine legitimacy to the new nation and his new cult. He linked and conditioned the eschatological destiny of the world to the eschatological destiny of America. He stated things that many Americans wanted to hear, even if they were contrary to the truth. In the 19th century the *Book of Mormon* could not be confuted because the history and the geography of the American continent were little known and the media was relying only on paper products. But today, in the light of 21st-century knowledge, the *Book of Mormon* is nothing but religious fiction.

The infallibility of the *Book of Mormon* is the *pièce de résistance* of the Mormon faith. The Mormons say that "the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book." [865] By contrast, the Bible is accepted as the Word of God as long as it is correctly translated. [866] Apparently, the *Book of Mormon* could not have beer written in such a short time unless the author was divinely inspired. Smith, at the age of 20, could not invent an entire history of a continent. [867] However, the current evidence show that the manuscript of the *Book of Mormon* was polished over a period of time before publication. Moreover, illiteracy – a feature which supposedly proves that Smith's teachings do not have human

origin – does not necessarily imply idiocy. Muhammad claimed revelations in order to justify the writing of the Quran; Jesus was only the son of a carpenter; and Ellen White, contemporary with Smith and the prophet of the Seventh-day Adventism, was also an illiterate and she claimed similar revelations.

Historical support is the backbone of any religion because the scenarios of the future become legit only if they rely on scenarios of the past. Christianity, for example, relies on the events described in the Bible, partially confirmed through geographic, historical, literary and archaeological evidence. Palestine, the Roman Empire or the city of Jerusalem, among many other things, are proven historical facts. By contrast, Smith reinvented the past of the people of Israel and of the American continent to support the glorious future of Mormonism and of the American nation. The *Book of Mormon* depicts places and events that cannot be traced in space and time. The few illustrated maps within the book do not correspond to any landform on the globe. There is no evidence to support the slightest thing from the *Book of Mormon* . While all the empires of the world left behind proofs of their existence through coins, inscriptions, jewelry, weapons or buildings, there is absolutely no material evidence to support the existence of the three great civilizations described in the *Book of Mormon* . Likewise, there is not a single evidence that Jesus descended in America, that Christianity existed before the coming of Europeans (*Book of Mormon* , Mormon 9:32) or the extensive use of metals; on the contrary, Native Americans mainly used stone and wood.

The Mormon Thomas Stuart Ferguson was a member of the department of anthropology at the Brigham Young University and a fierce defender of the *Book of Mormon* . He was one of the first who made excavations and conducted research in Central America, hoping to bring to surface tangible proofs regarding the truthfulness of the *Book of Mormon* . In the middle of the 20th century, after he invested hundreds of thousands of dollars and 25 years of archaeological work, Ferguson finally came to admit that he wasted his talent for a lie. [868]

The *Book of Mormon* contains factual errors. It wrongly describes the presence in America of horses, goats, donkeys, elephants, cows, sheep, wheat or barley – things that had been totally absent from the flora and fauna of the

continent (*Book of Mormon* , 1 Nephi 18:28; 2 Nephi 12:7; Mosiah 9:9). In contradiction to the Bible, the *Book of Mormon* says that Jesus was born in Jerusalem (Alma 7:10), and not Bethlehem. And Lehi built a temple in America as Solomon did in Jerusalem, although building a temple in a location other than Mount Moriah is forbidden from a Judaic point of view.

The *Book of Mormon* lacks originality. The main themes of the book – American exceptionalism, the Lost Tribes of Israel and Parousia – were the dominant ideas of the Second Great Awakening. The Bible was a source of inspiration as well: Lehi is a copy of Adam and Eve, while Laman and Nephi are a repetition of Cain and Abel. Laman is the rebellious son as Cain, while Nephi is the obedient son similar to Abel. And, as Cain killed Abel, the Lamanites destroyed the Nephites. The *Book of Mormon* copied even the biblical language, using certain linguistic constructions, expressions, phrases or words meant to create the impression that it was divinely inspired. Mark Twain joked that if Smith had left out the many instances of "and it came to pass," the book would have been only a pamphlet. [869]

Not even the First Vision is unique; Smith barbarously copied themes from other contemporary accounts to forge his own version. Several dozen visionary stories published between 1783 and 1830 intersect more or less with Smith's version. In all cases the First Vision came at a distance of a couple of years after the experience of the others. For example, a certain Norris Stearns had a vision in 1815, [870] while Smith claimed he had it in 1820. They were close to death, they both were interrupted by a light, they both saw God the Father and God the Son in human form, they both were incapable of describing what they had seen, they both used the word "pillar" in their descriptions. Elias Smith, the cousin of Joseph Smith Jr., published his visions in 1816: they both entered a wood in the morning, they both saw a light, they both met with the divinity. A certain Solomon Chamberlain met with the Smith family in 1829 and confessed them his worries regarding the corruption of the existing cults, thus preceding Smith's concern. And last but not least, Charles Grandison Finney described his vision in 1821 and visited Smith's community for the first time in 1831: they both entered alone in the woods to pray, they both struggled to pray, they were both overwhelmed by a mysterious power that surrounded them, they both fell into despair and they both felt weak. In many of these cases of comparison the similitude is not

only ideological, but also textual. [871] These aspects lead to the conclusion that either God attempted to restore the true Christianity through a couple dozen American prophets or that Smith's statements are shameless plagiarisms. There is no reason to accept the First Vision as a true historical event; quite the opposite, there are lots of reasons to consider it fake. Smith altered it several times, there was no witness to confirm it, he reported it a decade after the moment he, allegedly, had experienced it and it fits the pattern of the inept American visionary experiences from the beginning of the 1800s.

4.3. MILLERISM AND THE "GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT"

While Joseph Smith Jr. was forging the Mormon aberration, another prophetic colossus was rising in the "burned-over district" of the New York State: William Miller. Smith and Miller had a different theological training, a different eschatological approach and even an opposite prophetic message; and yet, they both enjoyed a tremendous success. And, while Smith used false revelations and became an icon of prophetic falsehood, Miller was a sincere biblical scholar who turned into a model of prophetic failure. The latter is also a good example that human beings think what they are trained to think and see what they want to see: a chess player sees chess movements in real life, an economist sees around him transactions and economic opportunities, and a religious fanatic identifies apocalyptic trumpets and God's vials of wrath in the flow of history.

After 15 years of intense biblical and historical study, Miller concluded that a correct eschatological interpretation must rely on a couple of principles: the biblical prophecies are expressed in figurative language, but they are being literally fulfilled, the events described in the Bible can happen only once, and the biblical prophecies are codes that can be deciphered. This retired captain was one of the last major exponents of Protestant historicism: Revelation and the Book of Daniel were treated as maps of universal history, while the biblical images represented kingdoms, catastrophes, wars, historical characters or great discoveries.

The core of the Millerite doctrine was the 2,300 evenings and mornings from Daniel 8:14. By applying the day/year historicist system of decoding, the

2,300 evenings and mornings were interpreted as 2,300 years. This was supposed to be the period of time between the order of the reconstruction of the Temple and the moment when Jesus Christ would return to the earth. All the other theological and historical aspects – such as the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the establishment of the Papacy or the rise of Napoleon – were details that revolved around this thing. The order of the reconstruction of the Temple was given by Artaxerxe I of Persia to the Jewish scribe Ezra in the seventh year of reign, which corresponds to 457 BC (Ezra 7:12-26). Through calculations, backed by extensive biblical and historical interpretations, Miller concluded that 1843 was the year of the "cleansing of the sanctuary" (Daniel 8:14) – a metaphor for the purification of the earth through fire and the Second Coming of Christ. The first calculations pinpointed the date of March 21, 1843. [872]

Miller went public with his ideas in 1831, when he published eight articles in the *Vermont Telegraph* magazine and several pamphlets. Then, between 1834 and 1839, he held a series of public conferences, many of them published in *Evidence from the Scripture of the Second Coming of Christ, about the year 1843* (1836). The revivalistic preachers were using their attitude and tone to generate an emotional response, but they were bringing nothing new in terms of theology. Miller, instead, used reason and logics to convince his audience; he was the exponent of a rational God who acts upon a rational and clearly delimited history. Miller did not claim divine revelations and did not use the emotional articulation; on the contrary, he brought arguments to the audience, enumerated historical proofs, challenged the people to discussion, asked questions, waited for answers and accepted criticism. In the *Sign of the Times* magazine, edited by Joshua Himes, one of Miller's associates, *for* and *against* articles were equally published. Smith's revelations, for example, had to be accepted or rejected; there was no middle way. By contrast, anyone was welcome to verify the Millerite calculations. Millerism was an honest eschatological movement, different from the movements of the time. It was not a sect in the real sense of the word because it did not have a hierarchy, rituals and rules, it did not demand a certain lifestyle and it required neither a new baptism nor a repudiation of the initial congregations by its members. The only thing that united the Millerites was the belief that the coming of Christ was imminent. A fiery adversary of postmillenarism, William Miller was the symbol of the Second Great Awakening premillenarism: the end of

the world was close not because it had been foretold through visions or signs, but because history was on the brink of exhaustion and man could do nothing about it.

With a huge volume of processed information and well-grounded biblical and historical interpretations, the eschatological work of Miller and his associates was downright impressive. Compared to the other publications of the time, the Millerite ones, through their complexity and accuracy, were emanating power. And exactly this power intoxicated with apocalypticism tens of thousands of people. Others, however, got enraged by it; in 1840, in number three of the *Sign of the Times* magazine, an anonymous critic foretold Miller that in three years' time he would be as vexed as Jonah was when God refused to destroy the city of Nineveh. [873] And he was not far from the truth: the date of March 21, 1843, was the first eschatological spank in a series of four.

Almost a year passed until Miller and his associates came up with a new theory. In February 1844 he indicated a period within which Christ might return, but this time he avoided naming an exact date:

> *I believe the time can be known by all who desire to understand and to be ready for his coming. And I am fully convinced that some time between March 21st, 1843, and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come, and bring all his saints with him; and that he will reward every man as his works shall be.* *[874]*

This period was the second failure. After March 21, 1844, the Millerites began a new series of debates and studies. They quickly came to the conclusion that the Rabbinic calendar, used instead of the Karaite Jewish calendar, was "guilty" for the failures. In this way they came to indicate a new date, April 18, 1844. [875] This was the third failure. Again, the Millerite leaders admitted that they had been wrong, but they refused to abandon their beliefs. In a letter from May, published and entitled *To Second Advent Believers* , Miller wrote: "I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I still believe that the day of the Lord is near, even at the door; and I exhort you, my brethren, to be watchful, and not let that day come upon you unawares." [876]

In August 1844, during a camp meeting in Exeter, New Hampshire, Samuel Snow presented his own point of view. In a discussion based on complex mathematical calculations and connections between the Holy Scripture and history, Snow convincingly argued that Christ would return sometime in the fall of 1844. The most likely occasion for Parousia was designated to be the Jewish holiday of the Day of Atonement, in the tenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:27). According to the Rabbinic calendar, in 1844 the Day of Atonement was positioned on the 22nd of September. But Snow used the Karaite calendar, so the holiday was repositioned on October 22, 1844. [877]

Snow's "seventh-month message" revived the Millerite euphoria and offered a new reason to spread the word in the local parishes. On the other hand, the pastors warned their parishioners that Millerism was a dangerous doctrine and Miller was ignoring Christ's explicit warning that no one knows the day of his return. As the date of the 22nd of October got closer and closer the tensions escalated, each of the two sides having their own share of guilt for the hostilities that followed. Due to the rising opposition, the Millerite meetings began to be chaotic, depending on occasion and possibilities: in houses, rented halls or improvised tents. Some of the Millerites were excommunicated from their initial congregations, while others willingly isolated themselves from the rest of the world. The aggressions in fact strengthened the belief of the Millerites because they saw them as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

The approaching day of Christ convinced many Millerites to invest impressive amounts of money in Miller and his associates. The sources of the time mockingly depict how the converts to the Millerite cause donated their riches, resigned from their jobs, took their children from school, gave their money to the poor, no longer cultivated the land and abandoned their homes to wait for the opening of Heaven. There was no turning back; the end of the world had to happen on October 22, 1844, because the world of many Millerites was already over. The last days were dedicated to prayer, meditation and waiting for a new life: "This shop is closed – was written on a door – in honor of the King of kings, who will appear about the 20th of October. Get ready, friends, to crown Him Lord of all." [878]

In the morning of October 22, 1844, around 50,000 believers scrutinized the sky for a sign. And they waited... and waited... and waited... and at the end of the day all the preparations, the mercy, the leaflets, the sermons, the sufferings and the faith proved to be in vain. The day of the 22nd of October was a day like any other. But the next day the Millerites woke up in a world of hurt. Those who had sold their goods had to start over, from scratch. They gambled everything on Miller and they lost. All of a sudden they found themselves poor and in need. The Millerite Henry Emmons later wrote:

> *I waited all Tuesday [October 22], and dear Jesus did not come; – I waited all forenoon of Wednesday, and was well in body as I ever was, but after 12 o'clock I began to feel faint, and before dark I needed some one to help me up to my chamber, as my natural strength was leaving me very fast, and I lay prostrate for 2 days without any pain – sick with disappointment.* [879]

Washington Morse lived dramatic moments as well: "That day came and passed, and the darkness of another night closed in upon the world. ... my feelings were almost uncontrollable. I left the place of meeting and wept like a child." [880] Hiram Edson shared the same experience: "Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experience before. ... We wept, and we wept, till the day dawn." [881]

Due to its terrible aftermath, the day of October 22, 1844, remained known in history as the "Great Disappointment." The internal reactions to this existential and theological shock varied. Some continued to watch daily for Parousia, or they made plans for different future dates: April, July or October 1845. Others said that the world entered the seventh millennium, of the Great Sabbath, and from that point on those saved no longer had to work. Others explained that Christ refused to come because the Millerites were not pure enough, so they began to act like children, according to Mark 10:15. The Millerite O. J. D. Pickands claimed that Christ was sitting on a white cloud according to Revelation 14:16 and he had to be implored to descend. Others focused on Revelation 14:12, which praises the patience of the saints, and on Revelation 14:6, which insists on the importance of preaching the gospel to every nation, language and people. But the majority abandoned the cause and tried to rebuild their lives, converted to Shakerism or stepped on their pride

and returned to the churches condemned not long before as the synagogues of Satan. [882]

The external reactions were even worse; the Millerites had to deal with the mockery and the violence of the outsiders. A Millerite meeting place was burned in the city of Ithaca and two rooms were vandalized in Dansville and Scottsville. Hooligans released greased pigs in the middle of the camps and pulled down the tents upon those inside. In Loraine, the Millerite congregation received a reception of clubs, stones, knives and gun fires, while in Toronto a group was tarred and feathered. [883] On November 18, 1844, Miller wrote to Himes about these unpleasant experiences:

> *And some are tauntingly inquiring, "Have you not gone up?" Even little children in the streets are shouting continually to passers-by "Have you a ticket to go up?" The public prints, of the most fashionable and popular kind, in the great Sodoms of our country, are caricaturing in the most shameful manner the "white robes of the saints," Rev. 6:11, the "going up" and the great day of "burning."* [884]

Theologically speaking, the Great Disappointment caused a shock to historicism, it favored postmillenarism and prepared the ground for the spreading of dispensationalism. It was a hard and painful lesson for the doomsayers of the century, but it did not discourage subsequent prophets, such as Ellen White and Charles Taze Russell, to set new dates for Parousia.

4.4. ELLEN WHITE AND THE ADVENTIST VISION OF THE END

In January 1845 Joseph Turner explained the Great Disappointment through the "shut-door" theory based on the Parable of the Ten Virgins from Matthew 25:11-12. After the "heavenly door" was closed on October 22, 1844, people could no longer be saved. The period of the testing of the world was over. The wise virgins (the true believers) were going to be in the kingdom, while the foolish virgins (the infidels) were left outside, regardless of their subsequent actions. [885]

Hiram Edson came up with an even more interesting theory, which somehow complemented Turner's argument. Together with Owen R. L. Crosier and

Franklin B. Hahn, Edson conducted a thorough biblical study at the end of which he concluded that the “sanctuary” from Daniel 8:14 does not represent the earth or the Church as Miller previously thought, but the heavenly sanctuary. [886] Hence, the 22nd of October marked indeed the Second Coming of Christ, but on the heavenly realm. These new eschatological theories were published at the beginning of 1845 in the *Day Dawn* magazine. They were accepted and supported by Millerite leaders of the time, validated through the revelations of Ellen White and used for the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church claims to be the restorer of the true Church of God and the impersonation of the message of the three angels from Revelation 14:6-10 that urges the nations of the world to repent and to worship the Creator. The fulfillment of the apocalyptic prophecies and the current condition of the world indicate that the coming of Christ is near, right at the door, and the believers must be ready at any moment.

Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the direct successor of the Millerite movement, there are several crucial differences between the two. Millerism was not a sect in the real sense of the word because it lacked an official name, conversion, rituals and hierarchies. William Miller neither claimed he was a prophet or the leader of the movement nor he asked the adherents to adopt a certain lifestyle. On the other hand, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a veritable sect, with churches, hierarchies, regular meetings, its own doctrine, rules and ideas regarding the relation between man and God. Also, Millerism was based on the importance of an exact future date; instead, Seventh-day Adventism uses the failure of the Great Disappointment to claim that something important happened in Heaven and promotes an indeterminate end of the world. Seventh-day Adventism inherited historicism from Millerism, and at the moment it is one of the few movements that continue to promote this eschatological school. Nevertheless, while Millerism preached premillenarism and the impossibility to change the collective destiny, Adventism has been oriented toward postmillenarism and the conditioning of the end of the world by the world’s level of faith.

While Adventism came into existence due to the efforts of Hiram Edson and several other leaders, the all-time star of Adventism is the prophetess Ellen

White. Born in Gorham, Maine, Ellen White's maiden name was "Harmon." According to the former Adventist Dudley Canright, one of the most severe critics of the prophetess, Mrs. White's alleged prophetic spirit was the result of two things: her mutilation and the adheration of her family to Millerism.

At the age of nine a schoolgirl threw a stone at her and broke her nose. The blow was so severe that she stayed unconscious for three weeks. She hardly survived, but she remained disfigured for life. When she woke up and saw her disfigured face she suffered a deep depression. Most likely the blow irremediably damaged her temporal lobe of the brain – responsible with memory, speaking and hearing. She tried to resume school, but she had to interrupt it because she was no longer capable of concentration. So, her education was limited to, barely, reading and writing. [887]

Then, between 1840 and 1844, this damaged, insecure, weak, uneducated, emotional and abnormally religious girl came under the influence of Miller's fatalistic sermons. They had devastating effects upon her psyche:

> *Words of condemnation rang in my ears day and night ... I feared that I would lose my reason. ... My sufferings of mind were intense. Sometimes for a whole night I would not dare to close my eyes, but would wait until my twin sister was fast asleep, then quietly leave my bed and kneel upon the floor, praying silently with a dumb agony that cannot be described. [888]*

There is no wonder that such powerful feelings of guilt and impurity were followed by visions and dreams about going to Heaven and meeting Jesus. In addition, her trances might have been in fact symptoms of epilepsy caused by the mutilation, [889] a disease unknown until 1873. [890]

Today, Ellen White is an inseparable part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, in the period immediately after the Great Disappointment the relations and influences among the chaotic mass of Millerites were quite different. Between 1844 and 1861 she was a simple pawn inside this movement and she was not at all perceived as a prophet. On the contrary; the early Adventist leaders saw her first visions as effects of her poor mental state. According to Mrs. White, God miraculously endowed her with the gift of prophecy in December 1844, at the age of 17:

As God has show me in holy vision ... I turned to look for the Advent people in the world, but could not find them – when a voice said to me, "Look again, and look a little higher." At this I raised my eyes and saw a straight and narrow path, cast up high above the world. On this path the Advent people were travelling to the City, which was at the farther end of the path. They had a bright light set up behind them at the first end of the path, which an angel told me was the Midnight Cry [Miller's work]. *[891]*

In reality, achieving the prophetic spirit two months after the Great Disappointment was not a coincidence or the work of the Holy Spirit, but a refuge meant to defend the personal pride, to strengthen an aberrant doctrine and to create a new and clearly delimited cult. The former Millerites were eager to confer a meaning to the failure of October 22, 1844. And while most of them preferred to bring answers through study, Ellen White chose the path of revelations.

The unbroken string of prophetic failures began in the first part of 1845. According to Lucinda Burdick, a friend of Mrs. White,

There were also many failures. She pretended God showed her things which did not come to pass. At one time she saw that the Lord would come the second time in June 1845. The prophecy was discussed in all the churches, and in a little "shut-door paper" published in Portland, Me. During the summer, after June passed, I heard a friend ask her how she accounted for the vision? She replied that "they told her in the language of Canaan, and she did not understand the language; that it was the next September that the Lord was coming, and the second growth of grass instead of the first in June." September passed, and many more have passed since, and we have not seen the Lord yet. It soon became evident to all candid persons, that many things must have been "told her in the language of Canaan," or some other which she did not understand, as there were repeated failures. *[892]*

In 1846 Ellen Harmon became Ellen White after she married James White. In the same year the Whites started to collaborate with Joseph Bates. Unlike Mrs. White, who at the time was an anonymous 19-year-old girl, Bates was educated, driven by very strong beliefs and with a very strong influence

within the Millerite movement. To gain his sympathy, the Whites quickly accepted to keep the Sabbath as Bates advised them. And even though Bates considered Mrs. White's visions to be only the products of her mind, the Whites were eager to convince him otherwise. Bates had been a sea captain and he was fond of astronomy. He often spoke about stars, planets, their positions, their moons and the infinity of the Universe. [893] Apparently, Mrs. White did not seem to be interested in this topic, until

> *One evening, at the conference above mentioned [Topsham, Maine, 1846], at the house of Mr. Curtiss and in the presence of Elder Bates, who was yet undecided in regard to these manifestations, Mrs. White, while in vision, began to talk about the stars, giving a glowing description of rosy-tinted belts which she saw across the surface of some planet, and added, "I see four moons." "Oh," said Elder Bates, "she is viewing Jupiter!" Then having made motions as though traveling through space, she began giving a description of belts and rings in their ever-varying beauty, and said, "I see seven moons." Elder Bates exclaimed, "She is describing Saturn." Next she said, "I see six moons," and at once began a description of the "opening heavens," with its glory, calling it an opening into a region more enlightened.* [894]

From that moment on Bates strongly believed that her visions came from God. The truth behind this incident was, however, entirely different. If the vision was true, God would have revealed to her the real number of planets and moons, unknown to the astronomers of the time. Jupiter and Saturn have over 60 confirmed moons each, while Uranus has over 20. These moons vary from the gigantic Ganymede down to celestial bodies with a radius of 1 km. In addition, at the time no one knew that Uranus has rings, that it is followed by the planet Neptune, that our solar system contains dwarf planets – a category which includes Pluto – or that beyond the orbit of Neptune lies the Kuiper Belt. Instead, Mrs. White said only what was known at the moment of the vision and then she put an end to the solar system and to this alleged out-of-body experience through the formula "opening heavens."

The partnership between the Whites and Joseph Bates brought a new interpretation of the Great Disappointment. Influenced by Joseph Turner and Hiram Edson, Bates also believed that on October 22, 1844, Christ entered

the second part of the heavenly sanctuary, the period of grace ended, the 2,300 years passed and the chance for sinners to be saved “expired.” In 1849 all this nonsense was named the “shut-door theory” – a desperate attempt to transform the embarrassment of the Great Disappointment into a glorious theological victory. Christ did not appear because he first had to prepare himself for the Second Coming; and in this short time of preparation sinners had no hope of salvation because there was no one up there to listen to their prayers. On October 22, 1844, the “day of atonement” had begun, or the period of the third angel from Revelation 14:6-10, that was going to last exactly seven years, until October 22, 1851.

Through the shut-door theory any negative event was interpreted as a sign of the upcoming end. In 1848 Europe was engulfed in wars and revolutions, and news about crises of resources and food circulated across the ocean. Today, the year 1848 is generally seen as a year of political and social renovation. But at the time the situation was obviously sinister, and no one could predict the long-term effects of those events. In January 1849 Bates said that the condition of Europe was the beginning of the tribulation from Daniel 12:1 and the fulfillment of Revelation 11:18. His point of view was immediately confirmed by Mrs. White through a vision: “The time of trouble has commenced, it is begun. ... the trouble will never end until the earth is rid of the wicked.” [895]

Things worsened even in America. In the summer of 1849 a local epidemic struck the region. Bates announced that the time of tribulation began, and Mrs. White stated that the epidemic would rapidly spread and it would be fatal to mankind. [896] In parallel, James White wrote that “Babylon, the nominal church is fallen. God’s people have come out of her. She is now the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (Rev. 3:9). ‘The habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hateful bird’ (Rev. 18:2).” [897]

In a letter from July 1850 Sarah Harmon, Mrs. White’s older sister, suggests that many Adventists believed and supported Bates in the shut-door theory of 1851: “I believe this is the last winter we shall see before Jesus, our great High Priest, comes out. Oh, let us live for God and sacrifice for him faithfully.” [898]

But in 1851 Jesus obstinately refused to descend at the request of Bates and the Whites, while the historical course totally contradicted them. The social and political status returned to a certain level of normality, the local epidemic ended and the American states entered a period of peace that lasted several years.

After the failure of the shut-door theory Mrs. White prophesied about floods, storms, earthquakes, wars, all in general terms, without specifically mentioning persons, places or dates. At the Adventist conference in 1856 she declared: “I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus’.” [899]

On August 3, 1861, at the beginning of the American Civil War, Mrs. White formulated another pitiable prophecy: “I was shown the inhabitants of the earth in the utmost confusion. War, bloodshed, privation, want, famine, and pestilence were abroad in the land.” [900] In her vivid imagination the horrors of the Civil War were “clear” signs of the near end: “The scenes of earth’s history are fast closing. We are amid the perils of the last days.” [901]

Mrs. White made prophecies even regarding individual fates, custom-made, like an ordinary fortune-teller. She used the argument of divine guidance every time she had to take an important decision regarding the group or the private life of the members:

> *Once, when on their way to the eastern part of Maine, she saw that they would have great trouble with the wicked, be put in prison, etc. This they told in the churches as they passed through. When they came back, they said they had a glorious time. Friends asked if they had seen any trouble with the wicked, or prisons? They replied, “None at all.” People in all the churches soon began to get their eyes open, and came out decidedly against her visions; and, just as soon as they did so, she used to see them “with spots on their garments,” as she expressed it. I was personally acquainted with several ministers, whom she saw landed in the kingdom with “Oh! Such brilliant crowns, full of stars.” As soon as they took a stand against the visions, she saw them “doomed, damned, and lost for ever, without hope.” [902]*

In 1862 a certain Moses Hull was about to give up on Adventism. Mrs. White wrote to him: “If you proceed in the way you have started, misery and woe are before you. God’s hand will arrest you in a manner that will not suit you. His wrath will not slumber.” [903] Eventually, Moses Hull abandoned Adventism and, despite Mrs. White’s prophetic threats, he lived very well up to an old age. [904]

The early Adventists who had dared to criticize Ellen White ended up being banished or humiliated, sometimes even through alleged visions: “there appeared a chariot of gold and horses of silver above me, and Jesus, in royal majesty, was seated in the chariot. ... Then there came the words rolling down over the clouds from the chariot from the lips of Jesus, ‘Fannie Bolton is your adversary!’” [905] Fannie Bolton was Ellen White’s editorial assistant in Australia. Often praised for her ability to write, she ended up being fired. All the conflicts and the prophetic failures were followed by punishment of scapegoats, so that Mrs. White and the Seventh-day Adventist Church would look innocent. [906]

In the 71 years of prophetic activity Ellen White was credited with the writing of approximately 20 volumes. But Mrs. White’s writings are anything but prophetic. Her books are entirely dedicated to personal problems, interpretation of the Bible and Christian conduct. The prophecies appear nowhere in her works. On the contrary; despite her claims that she wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she plagiarized so much that one of her books had to be hidden entirely, while another had to be revised at the cost of 3,000 dollars. [907]

There are numerous similarities between Ellen White and other visionaries. Both her and Ann Lee, the prophetess of Shakerism, started from secondary positions within the sects they afterward came to lead, both received no education, both were tormented by deep feelings of guilt and impurity, both had decisive moments in life that marked their prophetic destiny, both received apocalyptic revelations from God and called them “testimonies” and both saw themselves and their group as the forerunners of the Kingdom of God. Likewise, Mrs. White’s evolution and communications with angels seem like a bad copy of 18th-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg was so determined to purify his soul and to communicate with

God that Honoré de Balzac nicknamed him the “Buddha of the North.” Both Mrs. White and Swedenborg rejected the doctrine of salvation only through faith, both demanded the reform of Christianity through their own doctrines, both, allegedly, communicated with angels and even with Jesus Christ, both emanated all kinds of prophecies and their work covered dozens of years, until the end of their lives, during which they wrote dozens of volumes. The philosopher Immanuel Kant studied with enthusiasm Swedenborg’s writings, but harshly concluded that all his claims were nothing but illusions. [908] And last but not least, angels revealed to Mrs. White that her generation would see the end of the world, as angels told Swedenborg that the world was going to end in 1757. [909]

Currently, the Adventists condemn those who try to find the date of Parousia: “Satan would have us believe that we can actually figure out the proximity of the Lord’s return; that by casting up figures and computing statistics we can determine how far the last gospel message has extended, and how nearly Israel is made up.” [910] But they condemn exactly what Miller did in 1843 and 1844. And, given the fact that Mrs. White says that Miller was God’s servant and Millerism was a “glorious manifestation of the power of God,” [911] it follows that Adventism was founded on a conspiracy of Satan. An article in *Present Truth* from February 4, 1915, said that “if there is one characteristic above another that marks out a false prophet, it is the unscriptural practice of setting a definite time for the return of our Lord.” [912] But it is absurd to say that the moment of Parousia can be scripturally or unscripturally calculated; Jesus Christ made no such distinction. This Adventist statement aimed to denigrate Charles Taze Russell, the founder of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and at the same time to create a theological refuge for Mrs. White. But if calculating the date of Parousia proves that Russell and others are false prophets, then this thing also incriminates Miller, Bates and especially White. The Adventists cannot blame others for this practice without blaming themselves. And the culminating display of insolence is blaming the divine for the Millerite failure of 1843: “I have seen that the 1843 chart was directed by the hand of the Lord, and that it should not be altered; that the figures were as He wanted them; that his hand was over and hid a mistake in some of the figures.” [913]

The logical conclusion is that Ellen White, like Joseph Smith Jr., fits the

same dull pattern of cheap prophets of the American religious awakenings. These charlatans used monopolistic visions about inaccessible and unverifiable events in order to manipulate the others and to protect themselves from criticism and examination. And the fruit of their proud work can be seen today in the multitude of “gangs” of hypocrites that simulate purity.

5. THE THIRD GREAT AWAKENING

It is debatable if a Third Great Awakening took place indeed between 1850 and 1900 or what happened was only an extension of the Second Great Awakening. A religious awakening must be preceded by a religious sleep of the masses. Almost a century separates John Winthrop’s discourse from the First Great Awakening. And there are more than 60 years between the First and the Second Great Awakening. Until the middle of the 19th century the religious awakenings and sleeps interchanged. Instead, the Third Great Awakening started immediately after the Second Great Awakening; there was no period of religious relaxation and the general euphoria was weaker compared to the previous awakenings. The problem was that the Second Great Awakening lacked closure; a part of the religious systems and utopias which began in the first part of the century extended into the Third Great Awakening. The world and science were changing fast and religion had to keep up the pace; there was no time for another religious relaxation.

The Third Great Awakening was a reaction to the pressure exercised by science upon religion. In 1859 Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution undermined all religious foundations. Occultism, theosophy and spiritualism rose in reaction to this materialistic and rationalistic attack, at the same time signaling that the theological synthesis of the Second Great Awakening failed. In the middle of the century a large number of Americans were disillusioned by the prophetic or utopian failures, by the problem of slavery, or by the problem of racial and gender inequality. In 1857 a financial panic erupted, causing economic chaos, the bankruptcy of many banks and of the railway companies. The American states were on the brink of collapse and a civil war seemed unavoidable.

The challenge of the Third Great Awakening was to create new systems of belief at a time when the infallibility of the Bible was heavily contested. One answer to this issue came from Mary Baker Eddy, who in 1886 introduced the concept of “Christian Science” – a complete, coherent, verifiable and demonstrable science of nature. The biblical miracles can be explained through science and Eddy, apparently, learned the method of Christian Science after she cured a wound by applying one of Jesus’s remedies. [914]

Others preferred to answer with obstinacy. The failures of the Second Great Awakening and the Civil War, together with the scientific development, created a context that helped John Nelson Darby promote his dispensationalism and the literal interpretation of the Bible in America. In 1878 the leaders from Niagara stated the divine and plenary inspiration of the Bible, the total depravity of man, the necessity of a new spiritual birth and the premillenarist return of Christ. The divine authority of the holy texts demands a literal fulfillment of the prophecies. The end is very near, but it is not predictable; so, the Millerite arithmetic and the fallible calculations are irrelevant. Only one thing is certain: the Bible is never wrong, it is infallible. But its human interpreters can make mistakes, and exactly these mistakes are the source of opposing interpretations, reinterpretations and schisms that have influenced the history of Christianity. [915]

The postmillenarism of the Third Great Awakening gave rise to social activism, movements and actions of social reform, new utopian experiments, new sects and a powerful missionary activity. After the Civil War the American people faced the convulsions of the Industrial Revolution. The cities were packed with poor and unhappy workers, the proletariat of Marxist theories. Religious groups such as the Salvation Army or the Social Gospel channeled their energy to repair the everyday problems of society: poverty, gender inequality, violence, racial discrimination, alcohol, child labor, poor hygiene or faulty education. Such groups believed that the Second Coming of Christ cannot occur as long as mankind does not remove, through its own efforts, social malignity. [916]

As the millennium was, allegedly, getting closer and closer, postmillenarism encouraged the progressive outpouring of the Spirit, a hysterical wave of miraculous healings, visions and speaking in tongues. The contrast between

the scientific enthusiasm and the increasing desire of Christians to experience the divine was amazing. Mass revivals were expected to, once again, sweep the nation. The Holiness Movement preached that the carnal nature of man can be cleansed by the Holy Spirit only if one has his sins forgiven through the faith in Jesus Christ. The purpose of the movement was reaching absolute sanctification, as it had been conceived by the Methodist John Wesley. And when the Holiness Movement began to fade at the end of the century, Pentecostalism came out. [917]

Due to the peculiar way of worship – through spasms, ecstatic crises, torrential weepings, faith healings, miracles, prophecies and speaking in tongues – the early Pentecostals were severely criticized. The preacher Alma White named the Pentecostal tongues "satanic gibberish" and the religious services "the climax of demon worship." William Godbey characterized them as Satan's preachers, jugglers, necromancers, enchanters and all sorts of mendicants. For Campbell Morgan the Pentecostal movement was "the last vomit of Satan," while the evangelist Reuben Torrey said it had been invented by a Sodomite. [918] The ostracism did not quench the zeal and the activism of the Pentecostals; it only allowed them to adopt the false image of victimization. All the sects persecuted have conveniently transposed themselves into the role of the early Christian Church persecuted by the pagan Romans. And in all cases the persecution has been seen as an obstacle of Satan meant to prevent the spreading of the true faith; all have condemned the decadent society and implicitly the other sects, and all have claimed that they are special and that they possess the true worship of God. [919]

During the Third Great Awakening American exceptionalism began to be supported through two distinct channels. On the one hand, there were the preachers and the adherents of British Israelism – such as Charles Spurgeon [920] or Charles Totten [921] – who continued to promote America's exceptionality by using religious arguments. In their delusional view the Anglo-Saxon race was the direct descendant of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and it was blessed by divinity with freedom and pre-eminence in commerce. On the other hand, the theory of evolution and the scientific expansion emptied the concept of American exceptionalism of its religious content and adapted it for a social and political usage. America could no longer use religious arguments to support its leading image on the international political

scene. This aspect was reflected even in utopian communities such Amana Church Society, which had been established on religious foundations but turned into social or economic organizations. [922]

Ultimately, the Third Great Awakening confirmed once again that Christian apocalypticism can manifest itself in any circumstances and within any group, even quasi-Christian. Besides wars and diseases, Europeans exported Christianity as well. And together with Christianity came the apocalyptic ideas. The coming of the Europeans was a veritable apocalypse for Native Americans. Slaughtered, chased away, humiliated and sent into slavery, the natives became receptive to anything that could give them hope or salvation. As in the case of Nat Turner and the rebellion of the black slaves, the combination between oppression and evangelization led to the rise of native messiahs. John Slocum, an Amerindian converted to Shakerism, was raised to Heaven during a high fever and God designated him the Messiah of the Amerindians destined to bring them salvation. Likewise, Wovoka, a Paiute converted to Christianity, spoke with God during the solar eclipse of January 11, 1889. This promised him that the white invaders would be annihilated and the resources of the land would be restored. God also offered Wovoka the "Ghost Dance" – a ritualistic dance through which the practitioner, allegedly, was becoming invulnerable to bullets. This belief, which resembles the one of the Israelites at the siege of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27), triggered a conflict with the federal forces that sent to death 30 soldiers and 146 natives. [923]

5.1. THE ETERNAL ARMAGEDDON OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Founded in the second part of the 19th century by Charles Taze Russell, the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses rose from the Millerite ash on the theory that the expected event was just, but the date was erroneously calculated. A charismatic figure, Russell never claimed to have had divine revelations. Instead, he believed that God had endowed him with wisdom to correctly interpret the Bible. Between 1870 and 1875 the Russell family, together with the Adventist pastors George Storrs and George Stetson, intensively studied the Bible and the history of Christianity. Following this intellectual effort they concluded that they gained a better understanding of the Bible and that

they found significant errors in the foundations of the contemporary Christian doctrine. They all rebaptized in 1874.

In parallel with Russell, the former Millerite Nelson Barbour began a new round of biblical and prophetic study. In 1873 he launched the *Herald of the Morning* magazine, in which he advanced a possible return of Christ in 1874. One year later Russell found a copy of Nelson's work and contacted him to establish a meeting and to compare the notes. They both agreed that Parousia took place indeed in 1874, but in an invisible way, and it would become visible in 1878. In this period of four years the return of Christ could be known only to the true believers. This is how the association between Barbour and Russell began. The latter was so impressed by the conclusions they had reached, that he sold his clothing stores and invested the money in conferences, brochures, magazines and books for spreading the new doctrine.

The enthusiasm turned quickly into humiliation. After 1878 passed uneventfully, Barbour and Russell started a sterile debate that lasted almost one year and a half and ended up with mutual accusations for the prophetic failure. This embarrassing schism made Barbour recant some ideas initially shared with Russell, including the support on prophetic chronology. Barbour founded the Church of the Strangers in the same year and continued to publish *Herald of the Morning* . Russell on the other hand retracted the financial support and started his own periodical, *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* , with the first edition in July 1879. And in 1881 he founded Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, to distribute books, postcards and leaflets with his religious views. [924]

Russell's followers gathered as autonomous congregations of biblical study. Russell rejected the formal concept of organization for him and his adherents and he declared that he kept no records regarding the names or the beliefs of the members. But his followers willingly left the original churches and they entirely dedicated themselves to the system of ideas promoted by Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society. The movement became known by the name of "Bible Students." [925] Only in 1931 it took the official name of "Jehovah's Witnesses," according to Isaiah 43:10, 12: "Ye are my witnesses, saith Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: ... therefore ye are my witnesses, saith

Jehovah, and I am God."

Jehovah's Witnesses are not led by a single opinion, but by a group of people who are behind all the biblical interpretations, important decisions and material editing. The Witnesses say that God most of the time communicated with the world through a group of people, the people of Israel, and not through a single individual. Concurrently, they avoid the mistake of the Catholic Church of having a pope who replaces God on the earth. The body of government and its legal instrument, renamed "Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society" in 1896, are divinely authorized to interpret, to distribute or to transmit the instructions received directly from God to the rest of his approved servants: "The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society is the greatest corporation in the world, because from the time of its organization until now the Lord has used it as his channel through which to make known the glad tidings to many thousands." [926] God manifests himself on the earth through the organization and outside it there is no salvation or divine favor.

Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Trinity and Jesus's divinity. Instead, they say that there is only one God and his name is "Jehovah" – a name that comes from the Romanization and vocalization of the Hebrew word "YHWH" (Iahve, Yahve, Yahweh). Jehovah can be identified with God the Father or the God of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ was only a messenger and a (ordinary) son of God, not the Son of God. The title of "Son of God" mentioned by Jesus is in fact a higher level of spiritual existence. All the miracles of the Savior, including the resurrection of his own body, were made through the power and with the help of Jehovah. Jesus was a model for mankind in order to prove that through the right path every person has the possibility to become son of Jehovah and gain the power of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). The Witnesses also believe that the references to Michael the Archangel, Apollyon, Abaddon (Revelation 9:11) and the Word – they all refer to Jesus. [927]

The eschatology of Jehovah's Witnesses is divided into two large periods: the period between the years 1874 and 1914, and the period after the year 1914. At the beginning of the movement Russell simply "stripped" the Millerite year of 1844 of its eschatological significance and assigned it to the year 1874. Through chronological calculations, biblical and historical analyses

and the use of pyramidology [928] Russell concluded that the year 1874 marks 6,000 from the banishment of the first people from Paradise and the establishment of the Millennium. Until Russell's death every publication of the *Zion's Watch Tower* magazine had on the cover the year of the world's age alongside the year of the present era. But after 1874 passed uneventfully, Russell, instead of admitting he was wrong, conveniently said that his calculations were accurate and the return of Christ was invisible. The early Witnesses saw Parousia as an event that unfolds over a long period of time, of dozens of years, according to a plan in two stages.

The first stage consisted of three phases. The first phase of the first stage occurred in the heavenly realm in the year 1874, when Jesus Christ cleansed the heavenly sanctuary of all that was evil and he threw Lucifer and his angels down to the earth (Revelation 12:7-9). In the second phase Jesus was crowned king of the world and Jehovah gave him power. And in the third phase Jesus invisibly descended to Earth to search for people with a pure soul to reign with him in the heavenly sanctuary for 1,000 years. Jesus's examination of the world was about to take place for 40 years, until 1914, during which time only the true believers could be aware of his invisible presence.

The second stage of Parousia was the one described in Revelation and gospels, when Jesus had to gloriously appear on the clouds of heaven, 40 years after his invisible coming, in 1914: "we present proofs that the setting up of the Kingdom of God is already begun ... the 'battle of the great day of God Almighty' (Rev. 16:14) which will end in A.D. 1914 with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." [929] The year 1914 was based on the "seven times" from Daniel 4:16. Russell interpreted each of these times (periods) as being equal to 360 days, which, if added, give a total period of 2,520 days. This number was further interpreted as signifying 2,520 years, measured from 607 BC. And so the year 1914 turned into a candidate for the visible return of Christ. [930]

So, for the first generation of Jehovah's Witnesses the years 1874-1914 represented the period of trial of the cult, followed by the visible coming of Christ and the beginning of the Millennium. Coincidentally, in 1914 the First World War erupted. While the world was entering one of its darkest periods,

Jehovah's Witnesses were cheerfully waiting for Armageddon and the collapse of civilization. But in 1916 the enthusiasm was cut by the death of Charles Taze Russell. It was the first major shock received by the group. The *New York Watchman-Examiner* magazine saluted the event with an acid characterization:

> *When Charles T. Russell, who styled himself 'Pastor' Russell, died, a remarkable man passed out of the world. We should unhesitatingly place him in a class with Alexander Dowie, and Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism. Keen-witted, eloquent and a master dialectician, he played the mountebank so successfully that he gathered multitudes of followers, in many instances deceiving even God's elect. He built around him a great organization of men and women, who responded to his leadership as the Mormons obey the commands of the prophet. A stream of gold poured into his coffers, and was used in a world-wide advertising propaganda. He was without training, and was never ordained to the ministry, and yet he spoke to unnumbered multitudes by voice and pen, and won to his erratic views many from all denominations. This success came despite the fact that his own life was a reproach to Christianity. It still seems to be true that men like to be fooled, and 'Pastor' Russell fooled multitudes.* [931]

Russell was accused both by contemporaries and former followers of being a tyrant, fraud, plagiarist, predator, sexually obsessed and even a member of Freemasonry. The early publications were filled with Masonic symbols. Likewise, his organization was depicted more as a vile scheme of extortion than as a religious cult. [932]

Then, in 1918, the group received a second shock, when the First World War was followed by peace. And despite the fact that the 1918 flu pandemic erupted, killing more than 50 million persons worldwide, it was clear that Russell's calculations failed miserably. This caused convulsions, mass desertions, an accelerated decline, ideological chaos and endless debates. The organization was on the brink of ceasing to exist. In 1920 the new leader Joseph Rutherford published the work *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* , in which he boldly stated that "we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return [from the dead] of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful

prophets of old." [933] But Abraham, Isaac or Jacob stubbornly refused to rise from the dead at the time set. Desperate to save the organization, the body of government shifted the entire apocalyptic scenario: Jesus did not return in 1874, but in 1914, and this time also in an invisible manner. Now, the year 1874 no longer marked the invisible coming of Christ among people, but the beginning of the period in which his invisible coming for the year 1914 was announced: [934]

> *Russell and his associates quickly understood that Christ's presence would be invisible. They disassociated themselves from other groups and, in 1879, began publishing spiritual food in Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence. From its first year of publication, this magazine pointed forward, by sound Scriptural reckoning, to the date 1914 as an epoch-making date in Bible chronology. So when Christ's invisible presence began in 1914, happy were these Christians to have been found watching!* [935]

It can be said that, due to the great shift and the transformations it suffered, 1914 was the year when the organization was born for the second time. But this painful experience taught the organization an important lesson: prophesying the end of the world through exact dates can bring ruination. Accordingly, 1914 was the year when Jesus was crowned king in Heaven and invisibly descended among people, but the date of his visible return remained unknown. However, a limit was set: the generation of 1914 was the generation that would live to see Parousia. The organization has no longer spoken about a precise date of the end, but about how many years have passed since 1914. Exactly like a donkey running after the carrot from the rider's rod – always moving, but never closer – the end of the world was turned into a vague, undefined era, in which every year "might be" the decisive year. From 1914 until 2000 Jehovah's Witnesses machine-gunned the eschatological importance of at least nine different years: 1915, 1918, 1920, 1925, 1935, 1941, 1957, 1975 and 1994. Their publications focus on a single theme: the imminence of the establishment of the Kingdom of Jehovah.

In 1919, five years after 1914, the Witnesses wrote: "We are standing upon the very threshold of the Messianic Kingdom, and that soon the Lord shall be

pleased to take us home, ... we shall shortly have the blessed privilege of being ushered into the eternal glories of immortality." [936]

In 1922, eight years after 1914: "the year 1925 marks the date when all shall see His mighty power demonstrated in the resurrection of the ancient worthies, and the time when 'millions now living will never die'." [937]

In 1939, during the Second World War, 25 years after 1914:

> *Fanatical Fascists and Nazi dictators, with the aid and co-operation of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy at Vatican City, are now wrecking continental Europe. They may for a brief period of time gain control of the British Empire and of America, and then, God declares, He will act and through Christ Jesus... will completely destroy all such organizations.* *[938]*

In 1952, 38 years after 1914:

> *We still are wondering if we did the right thing in returning to finish high school. Or would it have been better if we entered the full-time ministry. ... We know this old system of things will soon be destroyed at Armageddon, so why the reasons for attending high school when we could be out warning others?* *[939]*

In 1968, 54 years after 1914:

> *True, there have been those in times past who predicted an 'end of the world,' even announcing a specific date. ... Yet, nothing happened. The 'end' did not come. They were guilty of false prophesying. Why? What was missing? ... Missing from such people were God's truths and the evidence that he was guiding and using them. But what about today? Today we have the evidence required, all of it. And it is overwhelming! All the many, many parts of the great sign of the 'last days' are here, together with verifying Bible chronology.* *[940]*

In 1969, 55 years after 1914:

> *Many schools now have student counselors who encourage one to*

> *pursue higher education after high school, to pursue a career with a future in this system of things. Do not be influenced by them. Do not let them 'brainwash' you with the Devil's propaganda to get ahead, to make something of yourself in this world. This world has little time left!* *[941]*

After two world wars and half a century passed since 1914, in the 1960s the organization began to search for new dates in order to fuel the hopes of its members. In 1966 the sub-mediocre work *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* emphasized the "cruciality" of the year 1975. Its proud author, the president of that time Nathan Knorr, modified Russell's calculations and stated that the 6,000 years of the world were fulfilled in 1975: [942]

> *At all assembly points where it was released, the book was received enthusiastically. Crowds gathered around stands and soon supplies of the book were depleted. Immediately its contents were examined. It did not take the brothers very long to find the chart beginning on page 31, showing that 6,000 years of man's existence end in 1975. Discussion of 1975 overshadowed about everything else. "The new book compels us to realize that Armageddon is, in fact, very close indeed," said a conventioner. Surely it was one of the outstanding blessings to be carried home!* *[943]*

In 1990, 76 years after 1914: "By now, more than 70 years after [1914] that battle in the heavens, only 'a short period of time' remains before the war of Jehovah's great day breaks out." [944]

In 2003, 89 years after 1914:

> *What about us? Some 90 years have passed since the last days of this system of things began in 1914. We are certainly in "the time of the end." (Daniel 12:4) How should we respond to warnings we have been given? "He that does the will of God remains forever," states the Bible. (1 John 2:17) Now is therefore the time to do Jehovah's will with a keen sense of urgency.* *[945]*

Jehovah's Witnesses took advantage of the fact that the duration of a generation is a relative issue. In the first part of the 20th century the term

“generation” was understood as referring to those who were 20 years old in 1914. According to *The Watchtower* magazine from 1968, Armageddon had to occur around the year 1974, when the generation of 1914 was 80 years old. But the prophetic failures forced the organization to repeatedly extend the limits of the “generation.”

In the late 1970s the publications of the organization stated that the final generation was at least 10 years old in 1914, and the upper limit of age was lifted to 90 years old. After 1994 the “generation” was defined as being formed of all those who were born in 1914, without an upper limit of age. Thus, in 2014 the generation of 1914, according to the criteria of the organization, was the incredible age of 100. Rutherford’s millions of immortals proved to be, after all, very mortal. [946] This ridiculous situation forced the organization to commit, once again, the unimaginable, and it reset once again its doctrine. In 2013 the organization wrote:

> *In the past, we have stated in our publications that these last four references apply to Jesus’ arriving, or coming, in 1918. ... However, a further consideration of Jesus’ prophecy indicates that an adjustment in our understanding of the timing of certain aspects of Jesus’ prophecy is needed. ... We first considered that the great tribulation did not begin in 1914 but will start when the United Nations attacks Babylon the Great. Then, we reviewed why Jesus’ judgment of the sheep and the goats did not begin in 1914 but will occur during the great tribulation. Finally, we examined why Jesus’ arrival to appoint the faithful slave over all his belongings did not occur in 1919 but will take place during the great tribulation.* [947]

Saying that the above quotes are in stark contrast with what was taught from 1879 until 2013 would be an understatement; the very foundations upon which the Watchtower Society was built were shaken. Better said, the body of government confirmed that Jehovah’s Witnesses have no divine privilege and religious superiority, that Charles Taze Russell was a fraud and that their marvelous doctrine is an outrageous fallacy.

Jehovah’s Witnesses accept the Bible as the Word of God, but the body of government distorts it at will and selectively uses literal or symbolic interpretations in order to provide support for its theories. [948] On the ground

of a faulty original translation, in 1950 the organization published the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* – an edition of the Bible which contains a series of flagrant forgeries and hundreds of modified verses to support that God forbids vaccine or that God inspired the Great Pyramid of Giza (because Russell was fascinated by pyramidology); John 1:1 no longer says "the Word was God," but "the Word was a god"; the cross was replaced with the "torture stake" to support that Jesus was executed on an upright stake, without any crossbeam; instead of Holy Spirit they translated "holy spirit" or "active force" to deny the Trinity; Christ did not speak about his return, but about his invisible "presence," and people do not have to worship Jesus, but only to "listen" to him. The organization presents the edition of the Bible as an anonymous creation of the New World Bible Translation Committee and it refuses to divulge the identity of the authors. Allegedly, the merit for the entire work has to be given to God. But under the umbrella of anonymity and false modesty the editors are free from criticism for the errors and the distortions of the text. No one can verify their competence and qualification, if they were experts in Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic, the original languages of the biblical books. [949]

In the 21st century Jehovah's Witnesses continue to support their religious superiority and separation from the decayed society. They practice a dangerous premillenarism, manifested through the rejection of scientific discoveries and technological progress, the refusal to exercise citizenship rights (such as suffrage or military service), the refusal of social activities (ceremonies, celebrations, entertainment and sporting events) and the rejection of some medical practices (such as blood transfusion and vaccine).

Chapter III. THE CONTEMPORARY APOCALYPSES

1. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

The Old Testament repeatedly speaks about the banishment of the Israelite people and its regathering in the Promised Land. But the Israelites (the Jews)

have been enslaved and liberated several times until the present day. So, it is unclear if the prophecies refer to random future events or to the beginning of the Messianic Age. In the Book of Genesis God promised Abraham that his descendants would have their own country between Egypt and Euphrates (Genesis 15:18). The same promise was made to Jacob, whose descendants would have Israel as their country, they would be spread across the entire world, they would influence the world and they would be regathered in the Promised Land (Genesis 28:10-15). Around 1400 BC Moses warned the Israelites that they would have to leave the country, they would be scattered and killed (Deuteronomy 4:25-30; 28:36-37, 49-52, 64; 29:23). Then, around 750-686 BC Micah prophesied that the Jews would be hit by calamities (Micah 3:12). Between 520 and 518 BC Zechariah said that God would bring back the Jews from east and west to their country of origin, and that they would live again in Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:7-8). And between 701 and 681 BC Isaiah wrote that the Jews would return to their country from all directions (Isaiah 43:5-6).

Most of these prophecies seem to have had an exemplary and even repeated fulfillment. The Israelite tribes conquered Canaan and established the Kingdom of Israel sometime in the 11th century BC. After the death of Solomon in 926 BC, the kingdom was divided in two: Israel and Judea. These were conquered by the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Romans, and the people of Israel were scattered in 721 BC, 586 BC, 70 AD and 135 AD. Nevertheless, the Jews managed to preserve their national identity for more than 1,700 years, and toward the end of the 19th century they began to massively return to the Palestine area.

Unlike the situations from the past, the establishment of the modern State of Israel was not sudden, but it occurred in stages lined up over dozens of years. Neither was it the product of a single man or the outcome of a single action; it was due to a complex of ideas that became active when a favorable international context emerged.

In 1862 Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Kalischer stated that the salvation of the Jewish people, promised by the prophets, can only come from within, through hard work and sacrifices. [950] In other words, God is no longer working through direct interventions as he did in the time of Moses, but through the help he

gives to people in their choices. The statement of the rabbi came at a moment when anti-Semitism was escalating again in Europe, while the Jews were questioning their identity and they were undecided if they had to continue to struggle to regain their homeland or to wait for divine intervention. Later, in 1896, Theodor Herzl, a Jewish journalist from Austria-Hungary, published the work *Der Judenstaat* , in which he argued that the only solution to the "Jewish problem" of Europe was the establishment of a Jewish state. This is how Zionism came into being – a Jewish international movement created by the European Jews as a reaction to anti-Semitism and the identity crisis of the Jewish people. One year later Herzl founded the Zionist Organization, which at its first congress set as guidelines the protection of the Jewish people and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. In order to reach these objectives the Zionist congress established that the Jews from diaspora had to be better organized, the Jewish sense of belonging had to be strengthened, the Jews had to be encouraged to migrate to Palestine, Hebrew culture had to be promoted in the area and funds and international support had be obtained. [951]

In 1915 the British diplomat Henry McMahon exchanged letters with Hussein bin Ali, the sharif of Mecca. McMahon promised the latter the control of the Arab territories, with the exception of a couple of portions of Syria that stretch west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo. Palestine is positioned south of these areas and it was not explicitly mentioned. Based on McMahon's assurances, Hussein bin Ali started the revolt against the Ottomans on June 5, 1916. In parallel, Great Britain and France secretly signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement on May 16, 1916, with Russia's approval. This agreement defined the spheres of influence and control in Western Asia after the expected fall of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. It divided many Arab territories as areas administered by the British and the French and it allowed the institutionalization of Palestine.

On October 31, 1917, the secretary for foreign affairs Arthur James Balfour suggested to the British cabinet that a declaration favorable to the Zionist aspirations would allow Great Britain to continue to carry on an extremely useful propaganda in Russia and America. Balfour sent a letter to Walter Rothschild, a leader of the Jewish community in Great Britain, which later became known as the *Balfour Declaration* . It stated that

> *His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.* [952]

The declaration was issued through the efforts of Chaim Weizmann, an important figure in the island due to his chemical experiments related to explosives, and Nahum Sokolov, the secretary general (and future president) of the Zionist Organization. [953]

After the First World War, Great Britain held the British Mandate for Palestine, while the published editions of the *Balfour Declaration* encouraged the migration of the Jews to the area. [954] The British support for a Jewish Palestine was the result of centuries of Hebraism and British Israelism that had populated the island. But, although the ending of the First World War and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire had been a good opportunity for the British to exercise their influence in the area, the project was delayed. Moreover, 20 years later the Zionist dreams seemed to crumble with the start of the Holocaust. In this time of tribulation, many Jews hoped that the Messiah would come and would save them from the hands of the Nazis. But the Germans lost the war and the Jewish people, once again, managed to survive.

The irony is that the Second World War and the Holocaust were the necessary impulse for the immediate creation of the Jewish state. The Nazi persecution forced many European Jews to flee to Palestine and placed the Jews in the position of victims. And victimization brought them sympathy and international support. After the war the victorious powers were busy apportioning the territories and drawing the spheres of influence. So, in 1947 the United Nations adopted *Resolution 181* , which stipulated that, after the ending of the British Mandate in 1948, the territory was going to be portioned in two: Palestine and Transjordan. The first portion of the territory was meant to ensure a place for the Jews, and the second was destined to the Arabs.

The Jewish community agreed with the partition. On May 14, 1948, David

Ben-Gurion, at the head of the Jewish Agency for Israel, declared the establishment of the State of Israel, according to the partitioning plan of the United Nations. The leaders of the two superpowers, the American president Harry Truman and the Russian president Joseph Stalin, immediately recognized the new state. But the Arab countries and the Palestinian Arabs opposed, which resulted in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the first in a long series of conflicts carried out between Israel and the Arab world. Thirty years had to pass until an Arab country, Egypt, recognized Israel, and at the beginning of the 21st century the conflicts were far from over.

The establishment of the State of Israel brought into question another eschatological issue: the moment when the Temple of Solomon would be rebuilt. The rebuilding of the Temple is an essential element of the Jewish and Christian eschatologies and a symbol of the Jewish national and religious identity. Israel without a Temple is like a man without a soul. And the only purpose of the Temple is to shelter the Ark of the Covenant. Only when the Ark is placed in the Temple and the animal sacrifices resumed will the world's stage be prepared for the coming of the Messiah.

Each destruction of the Temple marked the decline of the Hebrew people, and each reconstruction was the sign of a period of peace and prosperity. But, even though after 1948 the millenarists raced each other in prophecies and biblical calculations, [955] it quickly became clear that it was not going to be rebuilt as long as instability reigns in the area. The Temple can easily be one of the main targets of terrorist attacks. In any case, with or without the Temple, the 20th century seemed to be the last of human history. The establishment of the State of Israel was immediately followed by the Cold War; the United States and the Soviet Union were ready to nuke each other. It was an insane context that gave rise to insane thoughts. For four and a half decades the Americans strongly believed that the end of the world would come either through a Soviet attack or through a war between Israel and the Muslim states. In fact, as an American, it was very convenient to see your own country triumphant and on the side of the good and the Soviet Union and the Arab as the end-time villains [956] – an image confirmed when the Russians supplied weapons to the Arabs before and after the Six-Day War in 1967. [957]

America acted as an older brother or as a guardian angel of Israel. In 1988 Ed

McAteer, founder and president of the Religious Roundtable organization, declared: “As Bible-believing Christians, we believe there exists an iron-clad bond between the State of Israel and the United States of America.” [958] David Lewis, president of National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel enumerated in his book *Magog 1982 Canceled* a total of 77 organizations whose purpose was to support Israel. [959] By contrast, in 1970 the evangelist Frank Epp severely criticized the holy image of America. He emphasized that the image of Christ allied with the American people and the Soviets and Arabs allied with Satan came from a superficial, typically medieval and self-centered perspective:

> *Christians should remind themselves that the various prophetic schemes that have had credence within the Christian community all arose in specific political contexts in which Christ and anti-Christ were related to the political powers of the day struggling against each other. The schemes changed with the changing of the powers. At the moment many Christians see Christ allied with America and the anti-Christ with Russia and the Arabs.* *[960]*

For the untrained eye, the establishment of the State of Israel was a wonder. [961] But from a Judaic point of view the event was a theological disaster. It may seem surprising, but Jews belonging to the extremist orthodox Judaism were against this project. And the motives behind this attitude were as serious as they could be. As Rabbi Amaram Blau explained, history contradicted the prophecy:

> *God promised he will redeem Zion with the Messiah. That redemption is to come in a manner and in circumstances clearly specified in Jewish tradition. The Messiah has not arrived. The specified circumstances do not exist. The creation of an independent Jewish state by men, not God in his own way and time, is a grave sin. It is faithlessness.* *[962]*

The modern creation of Israel bears no resemblance to the previous experiences of the Israelites. This raises the question if the modern Israel is one and the same with the biblical Israel. The former repatriations occurred instantly, through a general migration of the entire people, as a tight group. Instead, the current migration does not have clear boundaries: it was still unfolding at the beginning of the 21st century, the borders and the status of

Israel have been a constant source of conflict with its neighbors, and the modern State of Israel contains a large number of Arabs. But the most important thing is that the Messiah is missing. Moses delivered the Israelites from Egypt, while Cyrus the Great delivered them from the hands of the Babylonians. In both cases there was a leading messianic figure. The birth of the modern Israel seems more like a product of the collective work or an accident of history. This aspect can be conveniently interpreted as the invisible hand of God, but some such as Blau expected a scenario initiated, led and completed by the Messiah. The messianic expectations have been severely deceived and Jewish eschatology suffered a major failure. Theologically speaking, the people of Israel regained the body, but slaughtered the soul.

From a Christian point of view the establishment of the State of Israel, first and foremost, raised a moral problem: the fight between Jews and Arabs, which often resulted in deaths on both sides. No one concedes land without a fight. While in the Old Testament the Israelites annihilated and made war with many nations on Yahweh's command, in the New Testament Jesus preached about universal love and condemned the killing of man by man regardless of circumstances. So, the Jews might have the right to a country of their own, but the Christian God does not give them the right to commit crimes in order to achieve this objective.

Then, eschatologically speaking, the thriving of Israel is a sign of the rise of the Antichrist, who will use the power of the Jews to enslave the world. Jesus links the thriving of the Jewish people to the end of the world through the series of parables of the fig tree. In Matthew 21:18-20 and Mark 11:12-14 Jesus cursed the fig tree not to bear fruit anymore because it hadn't had any fruit, and in Luke 13:6-9 the vinedresser expected in vain three years (the three years of ministry of Jesus) for the fig tree to bear fruit. In the Old Testament the fig tree, the vine and the olive are used as symbols for the Jewish people because these trees thrive in the difficult soil of Palestine. [963] So, the fig tree and the parables about the fig tree are symbols for Israel and its relation with God. Jesus cursed the people of Israel because they had broken the covenant made with God. For this reason, for almost two millennia, it was "barren," scattered and oppressed. But now Israel is thriving again, and in Matthew 24:32 and Luke 21:29-31 Jesus suggests, again

through a parable, that the end will come when the fig tree will flourish. And, despite the state of war in the area, the State of Israel has continuously prospered since its establishment (Isaiah 41:18-20; 27:6; 51:3). [964]

2. THE ALIEN APOCALYPSE

2.1. A GOD REPLACED BY ANOTHER

For now, the strongest scientific argument that supports the existence of extraterrestrial intelligent beings is only a statistic: the Universe is so big that there has to be other life forms that possess the necessary intelligence to significantly alter their environment. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, comprises over 100 billion stars, and the known Universe comprises over 100 billion galaxies. Hypothetically, if one in a million planets capable of supporting life were indeed populated with life, and if one in a million planets that were populated with life would shelter intelligent life, then there would be millions of intelligent species in the Universe. So, following this reasoning, it is unlikely that Earth is the only planet that supports life and man is the only intelligent being in the Universe. The statistics, however, regardless of their kind, cannot serve as an indisputable proof that we are not alone, a proof that so far has been missing. Accordingly, the existence of aliens is a matter of belief.

The current cultural image of aliens is chaotic and even hilarious, formed of inexhaustible theories, countless “evidence” and lots of contradictions. On the one hand, huge funds and efforts are invested in scientific research to find microorganisms on various celestial bodies or to intercept a signal from unearthly intelligent beings. On the other hand, there is the media circus with flying saucers, aliens who violate our private property, disturb people’s sleep, sample cells, have fun raping or kidnapping humans, conspire to destroy us all, more aliens, secret experiments and human history rewritten. Since the beginning of the 20th century an industry that exploits our fascination and fear regarding the unknown Universe has been developed. Compared to other topics of paranormal (magic, spiritualism, fortune-telling, ghosts), aliens are at the top of the public’s preferences. Figuratively, there is an alien “invasion” in our everyday life: on TV, on radio, on the Internet, in

newspapers or magazines. Whether they are denied or accepted, the multitude of books, movies, video games, commercials or toys proves the fact that aliens are a modern legend with important mercantile implications.

The problem of aliens is that their image evolved according to scientific progress. The idea of intelligent beings that live on other planets appeared around the year 1900. And until the 1970s aliens were often depicted as coming from Mars or Venus. Both planets were believed to host life. With the help of the telescopes, the researchers of the time noticed that the surface of Mars is wrinkled by canyons – natural formations that were wrongly classified as canals (artificial). The geological formations were believed to be a huge irrigation system designed to support life. On the other hand, Venus fascinated with its thick clouds that cover the entire planet and does not allow the observation of the soil. Apparently, under the impenetrable atmosphere a prehistoric-like world was hiding, with dinosaurs and lush forests. Hence, the inhabitants of the two planets – Martians and Venusians – were very popular in entertainment industry; they became both a symbol for the wonders of space waiting to be discovered and an image of the human fears. They were visiting Earth only to steal resources and women. For example, in 1938, on the occasion of the feast of Halloween, panic erupted among the Americans when Orson Welles broadcast on radio H. G. Wells's production *The War of the Worlds* . The story was presented in a new style, by interrupting the program of another show and dramatically announcing that Earth was invaded by unfriendly beings from space. The broadcast was performed with such authenticity that it convinced thousands of people that the world was in peril (or at least New Jersey). Although in the following hours additional broadcasts repeatedly denied what had been previously reported, the panic was hardly appeased. The hysterical people blocked the roads, called the police and caused much damage fleeing. The next day Welles publicly apologized. [965]

The alien phenomenon suffered a sudden transformation shortly after the Second World War. In June 1947, while he was flying above the State of Washington, the American pilot Kenneth Arnold saw nine strange objects flying in formation, acting as saucers that float on water. The American pilot estimated the speed of these objects to 1,600 km/h, three times faster than any airplane of the time. It didn't take long until Kenneth Arnold's story and the

words “flying saucer” came on everyone’s lips. Four years later, the American officer Edward J. Ruppelt, involved in Project Blue Book, [966] coined the expression “unidentified flying object” (UFO). This was the moment of birth of ufology – the study of unidentified flying objects. Ever since, unidentified flying objects and aliens have been inseparable things. Any unidentified flying object was believed to be driven by aliens, and any alien was supposed to possess a unidentified flying object. Shortly after Kenneth Arnold’s bold confession, numerous American institutions and newspapers were bombarded with reports about UFOs. [967] Of all, only one profoundly influenced the history of the phenomenon: Roswell.

Just two weeks after Kenneth Arnold’s story, on the night of July 2, 1947 (or the 4th of July according to other accounts), near the town of Roswell, New Mexico, an enormous luminous disk seemed to have crashed. According to local witnesses, the American army arrived shortly after the incident and took the damaged ship together with its occupants, presumed to be unearthly beings. It must be mentioned, though, that at the time Roswell was sheltering the only air unit of nuclear bombardment in the world, and west of Roswell there was White Sands, a secret military complex where new weapons and missile systems were being built and tested. [968]

Seven decades later the debate about the Roswell incident was far from over. No one can say for sure what really happened that night, if it was a failed military experiment or an alien crash. The only thing certain about the Roswell incident are its effects: it gave rise to a new type of folklore and influenced the way we perceive today the alien phenomenon. Because of it, issues such as the appearance of aliens, their intentions, the technologies they own and the role of governments began to be seriously and publicly discussed.

Up to this moment tens of thousands of pieces of evidence regarding the presence of unidentified flying objects (videos, pictures, confessions or crop formations) have come to surface worldwide. Yet, the existence of extraterrestrial beings is supported by an insignificant number of questionable proofs. Despite the numerous descriptions and reports about direct contacts, there is no tangible evidence that could be verified and confirm the presence of aliens.

While unidentified flying objects are undoubtedly real, the explanation behind them is most likely as earthly as possible. Common sense and the logic of history link the Roswell incident to the military experiments of the Second World War, especially the Nazi projects. Indeed, like aliens, Nazism is also an inexhaustible source of folklore and wild theories. But it is a historical fact that during the two world wars weaponry was developed much faster than during peace time. In addition, it is no secret that the German war machine invested huge amounts of money and energy in military research, aiming to produce more efficient weapons. From giant bunkers and secret bases to revolutionary airplanes, the German army left behind a vast military legacy which, even today, is not fully known. [969] In addition, at the end of the war most of the engineers and Nazi projects fell into the hands of the Allies; Wernher von Braun and the V-2 rocket are the most eloquent examples. That being said, it is true that the Nazi flying saucers captured by the Allies do not enjoy the publicity of aliens, but the historical course supports this theory.

After the Roswell incident came into the media, the UFO phenomenon became richer through the emergence of the "contactees" – a new breed of prophets who pretend that they are in telepathic connection with superior intelligent beings from other planets or other dimensions. In 1947 the painter Allen Noonan in Long Beach, California, claimed that he had had a telepathic meeting with an alien. He then changed his name to "Allen Michael" and gathered a group which practiced tantric sex and vegetarianism. In 1973 Allen Michael founded the Universal Industrial Church of the New World Comforter and published the first volume of the series of alien revelations, *The Everlasting Gospel* . [970]

A similar story came from the postman William Ferguson. In 1948 he confessed that he had astrally traveled to Mars, where the native aliens had told him that they were going to send a friendly expedition to Earth. In 1955 he founded the organization Cosmic Circle of Fellowship to spread the revelations received from aliens. Instructed by Khauga, Christ's brother and one of the numerous interdimensional sons of God, Ferguson developed techniques of absolute relaxation, body healing and spiritual development. The purpose of these practices was to awake the superhuman consciousness, necessary for Parousia. [971]

Scientology came into being at the beginning of the 1950s through the work of L. Ron Hubbard. This said that all humans experienced countless past lives, including existences in advanced ancient alien societies such as the Helatrobus or the Marcabians. The best-known and most ridiculed story was that of Xenu, the leader of the Galactic Confederation. This brought billions of frozen people on Earth 75 million years ago and killed them with hydrogen bombs in order to solve the problem of overpopulation. The spirits of these humans were then captured by Xenu, mass implanted with certain specifications and grouped in clusters of spirits. When the "Thetans" (the Scientological term for the human being) die, they go to a landing station on the planet Venus, from where they are reimplanted on Earth and programmed to forget the past lives. To avoid these inconveniences, Hubbard advised his followers to refuse to go to Venus after death. [972] Scientology gained international fame because it managed to convince famous names, such as the actors John Travolta and Tom Cruise, to join its ranks.

In 1954 in El Cajon, California, Ernest Norman and his wife Ruth founded the Unarius Academy of Science. This organization taught that through the use of the physics of the fourth dimension people would be capable of communicating with higher-frequency intelligent beings. The Unarians believed in reincarnation and that our solar system was once populated by prehistoric interplanetary civilizations. In 1954 the Normans started to publish the series *The Voices* . In *The Voice of Venus* , a work of "channelling" (a form of telepathy), Venusians are described as bodies of energy that live in a higher vibrational dimension, imperceptible to man. The planet Venus and its culture are more spiritual than material compared to Earth, and the spiritual advanced earthlings go to Venus to further develop their spirits while they sleep. [973]

During the Cold War, when the nuclear threat caused hysteria, the extraterrestrial messages kept pace with the political events, both in fiction and in the minds of the contactees. In 1951, in the famous movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still* , a flying saucer lands in America and the alien humanoid Klaatu delivers an ultimatum that the Earth must learn to live in peace or it will be destroyed. In the same year the contactee George Van Tassel, allegedly, was astrally transported in a huge alien ship that was orbiting Earth, where he met with the Council of the Seven Lights. One year later,

Van Tassel was visited in flesh and bones by the humanoid Asthar, a friendly Venusian, who taught him how to build a structure meant to extend human life and to store all human knowledge (a sort of Noah's Ark of information). Van Tessel named his machine "Integraton" and this was his obsession for the next 25 years. The ultimate goal of the device was to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah from space. Van Tessel prophesied that on August 20, 1967, the third "woe" of the Apocalypse was going to begin through the destruction of the southeastern part of the United States by a nuclear Soviet attack. [974]

In 1975 the Swiss "Billy" Eduard Albert Meier said that since 1942 he had experienced regular contacts with the Plejarens – a humanoid alien species, similar to the Northern people, originating from the Pleiades. Meier, allegedly, was brought back in time by the alien Asket in order to personally meet Jmmanuel, the real Jesus Christ. The latter informed Meier that his evolution (Meier's) was the highest on the planet Earth. After this megalomaniacal experience, Meier foretold that four important leaders of the world were going to die, triggering the Third World War in 2006, 2008 or 2010. [975]

Alien messages predominantly speak about future disasters. In the 1950s Marian Keech, the leader of the Brotherhood of the Seven Rays, said that the brothers from space were channelling through his body different messages about mankind's fate. Guided by an unfortunate combination of alien ideas and Christian mysticism, Keech prophesied that Earth was going to be destroyed through a great flood in 1954. Only his small and pathetic group was supposed to survive, evacuated from the planet by aliens. [976]

On November 20, 1952, George Adamski was near the town of Deseret Center, California, when he saw a huge submarine-like flying object. A reconnaissance ship of shiny metal approached him, from which Orthon the Venusian descended. The two communicated through telepathy and hand signs. Orthon warned Adamski of the dangers of a nuclear war and took him on a trip to Venus, where he was temporarily reincarnated. [977]

Benjamin Creme, a theosophical guru and the vice president of Aetherius Society between 1957 and 1959, said that messianic figures, who would publicly reveal themselves in the future, were in telepathic contact with him

from within spaceships. But aliens could not land and publicly expose themselves because mankind was ignoring God's laws and it was emanating negative energy. The world was on the verge of self-destruction, but the Great Teacher, the Avatar of the Age of Aquarius, whom all religions speak about, was going to come to initiate a new age of spirituality and prosperity. [978]

Such ufological manifestations have been products of the human fascination with the planets Mars and Venus. And yet, even though it is hard to believe, Martians almost became an accepted reality in 1970s. Ground observations determined the fact that, of all the planets of the solar system, Mars resembles Earth in many aspects and it is one of the best candidates to support extraterrestrial life. For these reasons, in 1975 the American agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) launched the Viking program, consisting of two spacecrafts sent to collect data about the "Red Planet."

In July 1976 the spacecraft Viking 1 surveyed Mars with the mission to take and to send to Earth as many images as possible. Of the thousands of pictures received, two of them made history. After several improvements in image quality made by the engineers Vince DiPietro and Greg Molenaar, the Martian surface seemed to contain a formation that resembled an artificial structure in the shape of a human face.

The pictures processed by DiPietro and Molenaar had incommensurable effects. For the ufological community these were the scientific proof that we are not alone in the Universe and that the origins of man lie somewhere in space. In the following years all the other pictures of Mars published by the authorities were carefully examined by a hoard of ufologists. This led to the additional discovery of pyramid-like formations, situated approximately 20 kilometers away from the face. Hence, the Martian region called "Cydonia" was believed to contain constructions similar to the Egyptian Sphinx and pyramids. A wave of speculations regarding the origin, the age, the significance of the Martian formations invaded the media, [979] which revived and revolutionized pyramidology. After 1976 the alleged monuments of Mars, together with the myth of Atlantis and other mysterious monuments from all over the globe have been gathered under the umbrella of the alien theory. The ancient megastructures no longer contained prophecies and secret

codes emanated by God, but by aliens.

Twenty-two years had to pass until the mystery of the Martian face was elucidated. On April 5, 1998, the satellite Mars Global Surveyor arrived above Cydonia at an altitude of 440 km. Equipped with a photographic camera ten times better than the one in 1976 and even with a tri-dimensional mapping device, Mars Global Surveyor sent a high-resolution set of pictures in which the face of Mars was very flattened and lacked significant details – a sign that it had suffered a severe erosion during the two decades. What was photographed could no longer be called a face, but a common natural formation. Even the tri-dimensional analyses, on which so many hopes rested, completely killed the idea of an artificial structure. Nevertheless, not everyone has accepted these results, explanations such as data forgery and the presence of a conspiratorial hand being preferred instead. Moreover, even though in the last five decades archaeology brought powerful evidence against the alien origins of ancient monuments, [980] pyramidology and the prehistoric aliens have continued to be successful commercial topics.

It is no secret that ancient civilizations saw the sky as the divine realm of the gods and they built impressive monuments to worship the inhabitants of heaven. But it is a long way from pyramids aligned according to the stars of the Orion constellation to alien involvement. Besides, it is interesting that the Greek Pantheon or the Roman Colosseum, architectural wonders of ancient European civilizations, have never been included on the list of alien constructions because in these cases there is no doubt regarding the origin of their builders.

At a time when racial segregation was a major issue in the United States, the alien phenomenon got a racist odor as well. In 1967 Dwight York declared that he was the incarnation of a great master from another planet and he founded the Nuwaubian Nation. Depending on boredom and needs, York repeatedly changed his name, the doctrine, the location and the name of the cult. Guided by an inept combination of occultism, New Age, pseudoscience, Egyptology, black race supremacy and ufology, the Nuwaubians believed that the aliens who created us had lived on Earth in ancient Egypt as pharaohs. They will come back in the near future and they will mark the end of the world, when the white race will be destroyed. In 2004 York was

sentenced to 135 years in prison for fraud and multiple crimes of sexual assaults against minors. [981]

The New Yorker group Twelve Tribes of Israel had a similar view. Led by the self-entitled prophet Rawhab, the group prepared itself for the end of times, when only a few chosen blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans would survive. They believed that black space brothers were orbiting Earth in spaceships ready to save them and to transport them to a world free from persecution and white people.

Alien messages often refer to large apocalyptic trends such as New Age, climate failure or the approaching of the years 2000 or 2012. The sect Outer Dimensional Forces from Weslaco, Texas, believed that aliens invisibly returned in 1966 and they found the original Earth destroyed by human beings. Consequently, mankind was going to be wiped out through natural disasters. The only survivors were the members of the sect aboard flying saucers. According to the founder Orville Gordon (or Nodrog), AIDS was the disease of Armageddon and the planet had to be cleansed of human corruption and reset for a responsible and adequate use. [982]

In 1997 Anthony Delevin (or Gabriel of Urantia) gathered a group and isolated themselves in the wilderness of Arizona. Previously, a celestial being called “Paladin” declared Delevin the most developed spiritual specimen on the planet, the reincarnation of Francis of Assisi, Alexander the Great and Peter the Apostle. Delevin was convinced that sometime between May 5, 2000, and May 5, 2001, Earth would be destroyed, while he and his followers would be saved by beings from other dimensions. [983]

The ideologies based on the guidance of the brothers from space have proven to be only lamentable fabrications of egomaniacal minds. And of all the ufological groups of the 20th century, Heaven’s Gate is the best evidence that insanity and the alien myth can be a deadly cocktail. Established in the 1970s by the music teacher Marshall Applewhite and the nurse Bonnie Nettles, Heaven’s Gate presented itself as a combination of Christianity, evolutionary advancement and elements of science fiction. With about 1,000 adherents worldwide until the 1990s, Heaven’s Gate expected a violent and sudden purification of the planet by aliens. The only chance to survive this process was to leave the planet as soon as possible.

The first step toward the alien salvation was the spiritual separation through the channeling of hate. This meant that the members had to abandon all their human attributes and all things that kept them connected to this planet: family, friends, sexuality, individuality, work, money. They adopted an ascetic lifestyle, with strict rules, less food, meditation and awakening every day at four in the morning to admire their future home in space. Seven of the group's men, including Applewhite, voluntarily castrated themselves for a faster and easier ascension toward the next level of existence.

The second step toward salvation was the physical abduction of the members by aliens. Initially, the two leaders believed themselves to be the two witnesses of the Apocalypse and they proclaimed their immortality; the idea of suicide was firmly disapproved. But after Bonnie Nettles died of cancer in 1985, Applewhite's way of thinking took a more radical and darker form. He said that Nettles did not die, but that she had left her earthly vehicle in order to ascend to a superior dimension. One of the concepts introduced after Nettles's death was that of alien "walk-ins," similar to being possessed by demons. A walk-in is, allegedly, an alien soul from another planet who dwells in a vacant human body after the departure of the original soul.

The idea of walk-in was combined with the hypothesis of prehistoric astronauts, intensely debated in the 1980s after the discovery of the face of Mars. The members of the group believed that they were incarnated aliens, who had left their original bodies to reincarnate themselves into important figures such as Jesus Christ or Buddha. Aliens planted the seeds of humanity millions of years ago, and now they came to reap the fruits of their labor in the form of advanced spiritual individuals. The rest of the world was going to be destroyed.

On March 20, 1997, Applewhite registered himself on a tape speaking about mass suicide as the only method of escaping Earth. A couple of members did the same, letting their friends and families know that *post-mortem* they would be aliens. Six days later 38 bodies, including Applewhite's, were discovered in a house in Rancho Santa Fe, California. The autopsy revealed that they died due to poisoning with cyanide and arsenic mixed with vodka. In addition, to induce suffocation and a quicker death, most of them had plastic bags on their heads. [984]

The contact with fantastic entities or the abduction of people by unusual beings are themes that have accompanied mankind since prehistoric times. Aliens of different sizes, shapes and colors, flying saucers or alien civilizations are only the modern substitutes of fairies, elves, dragons, angels and magical realms. There are numerous similarities between aliens and fairytale creatures. Both categories involve intelligent beings that visit us and watch us, hidden places, abductions, journeys through unknown realms, time distortion, light, sexual relations or creatures that steal babies. In addition, every contact or abduction has bizarre or absurd elements, with gnomes who appear and disappear to ask the exact time or aliens who descend from spaceships only to serve pancakes. The contactees are a sort of intermediates or channels of communication between the two worlds, as witch doctors and sorcerers have been mediating between people and spirits. All these aspects converge toward the idea that the alien phenomenon is a mythical legacy that changed its essence, but not its structure. Aliens are the conscious reflection of our unconscious desire to understand the greatness of the Universe and our relationship with it. The modern man sees UFOs because this is what the cultural background stimulates him to see. The belief in aliens shares the same psychological root with the popular beliefs or even with the religious beliefs: we want to know that we are not alone, that there is a better place waiting for us or that there is someone or something that watches us and protects us.

2.2. THE DEATH OF RELIGIONS

Extraterrestrial beings fundamentally alter our view about history and undermine the religious phenomenon by killing the idea of divinity or supernatural being. An absent god, supported by questionable proofs, stands no chance against a visible and immediately accessible god, supported by science. Aliens are not supernatural beings, but natural beings that have the advantage of knowledge.

Until the Age of Enlightenment people explained the unexplained through the power of the divine. Now, all myths, miracles, legends, folklore and mysteries have a new and much more satisfying explanation: otherworldly intelligent beings with superior technology. “UFO religions” – as these kinds of beliefs are generically called – only changed a god for another. There are

strange similarities between UFO religions and the Abrahamic religions: the contactees are a precise copy of prophets; there are gathering places like churches or mosques; some UFO cults have scriptures with alien instructions; there are verbal formulas similar to prayers in order to establish a telepathic contact with aliens, and there are even so-called sacred places, such as Area 51. [985]

The past is constantly reinterpreted in the light of present knowledge. And, as in the case of classic religions, the past is a crucial element for UFO religions as well. Alien worshipers often state that otherworldly beings have been among us since the dawn of humanity. Of the countless descriptions of the gods, finding patterns to match the alien image is extremely easy. From the statues of Puma Punku, the sarcophagus of Pakal in Palenque, the Nazca Lines, the "sky people" in the ruins of Tikal to various ancient old murals or biblical descriptions, there are countless pieces of information on the globe that can be interpreted as portraying flying machines, lasers, teleportation devices, aliens or humanoids dressed in special costumes. In India, in *Mahabharata* , the hero Arjuna flies with a divine chariot alongside thousands of other amazing chariots (vehicles). Likewise, *Ramayana* and *Rig-Veda* describe flying objects or flying cities from within which *vimanas* – small aircrafts travelling at high speed – were exiting. [986] In Egypt, Osiris descends from the sky in a ball of fire and Thoth, the god of knowledge and wisdom, travels in a flying chariot. In the Bible, Elijah the Prophet is abducted to Heaven by God in a chariot of fire and a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11), while in Greek and Roman mythology the god Apollo walks in the sky in a chariot of fire.

However, some accounts were forged. Helena Blavatsky's *Book of Dzyan* was conceived by plagiarizing other texts. The book was supposed to support theosophy, but it is currently used to confirm the existence of prehistoric astronauts. The *Book of Dzyan* was meant to be a 2,400-year-old collection of Tibetan legends, but the events described within it allegedly took place 6,000 years ago. No enshrined deity is mentioned in the book. It speaks about beings that descended from the sky and became the leaders (or gods) of different groups of people. But these otherworldly beings came to quarrel among themselves. At a given moment one of the leaders threw a ball of fire toward the community of another leader and killed them all, people and

unearthly beings alike. After this event all these beings left with their ships and they have never returned. [987]

The Bible also contains several details of angels and manifestations of God that can easily be taken as proofs for the existence of aliens:

> *And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire infolding itself, and a brightness round about it, and out of the midst thereof as it were glowing metal, out of the midst of the fire. And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings [thus]: their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle. And their faces and their wings were separate above; two [wings] of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches: [the fire] went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold, one wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures, for each of the four faces thereof. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto a beryl: and they four had one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within a wheel. When they went, they went in their four directions: they turned not when they went. As for their rims, they were high and dreadful; and they four had their rims full of eyes round about. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the*

earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went; thither was the spirit to go: and the wheels were lifted up beside them; for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. And over the head of the living creature there was the likeness of a firmament, like the terrible crystal to look upon, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two which covered on this side, and every one had two which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a noise of tumult like the noise of a host: when they stood, they let down their wings. And there was a voice above the firmament that was over their heads: when they stood, they let down their wings. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above. And I saw as it were glowing metal, as the appearance of fire within it round about, from the appearance of his loins and upward; and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake (Ezekiel 1:4-28). Then the Spirit lifted me up ... And [I heard] the noise of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, even the noise of a great rushing (Ezekiel 3:12-13).

According to the Nation of Islam – a UFO cult which believes that aliens created the world and they will also destroy it on Judgment Day [988]– Ezekiel describes a Mother Plane (Wheel):

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad told us of a giant Mother Plane that is made like the universe, spheres within spheres. White people call them unidentified flying objects (UFOs). Ezekiel, in the Old Testament, saw a

wheel that looked like a cloud by day, but a pillar of fire by night. The Hon. Elijah Muhammad said that that wheel was built on the island of Nippon, which is now called Japan, by some of the original scientists. It took 15 billion dollars in gold at that time to build it. It is made of the toughest steel. America does not yet know the composition of the steel used to make an instrument like it. It is a circular plane, and the Bible says that it never makes turns. Because of its circular nature it can stop and travel in all directions at speeds of thousands of miles per hour. He said there are 1,500 small wheels in this Mother Wheel, which is a half mile by-a-half-mile. This Mother Wheel is like a small human built planet. Each one of these small planes carry three bombs. [989]

With approximately 70,000 members worldwide in 2008, Raëlism is the largest UFO religion in the world. [990] This was founded by the former French journalist Claude Vorilhon, now known as "Raël." On December 13, 1973, Vorilhon found a spaceship within Puy de Lassolas, an inactive volcano near the city of Auvergne. The 25,000-year-old humanoid Yahweh descended from the ship and revealed to Vorilhon the answers to mankind's major mysteries. Yahweh explained to Vorilhon that Earth was initially empty, with thick clouds and shallow seas, but the "Elohim" – the name primitive people gave to the extraterrestrial beings – came, scattered the clouds, exposed the sea to light, built a continent and synthesized a global ecosystem. The Elohim have advanced knowledge of nanotechnology, astronomy, terraforming and genetic engineering, which allowed them to adapt life on the surface of the planet. Yahweh also offered explanations regarding the Garden of Eden, which was in fact a great laboratory; the Great Flood, a result of a nuclear explosion caused by the Elohim to clean Earth of the people who rebelled; Noah's Ark, a spaceship that kept the DNA of all creatures so that the world could be rebuilt through cloning; and the Tower of Babel, a rocket that was supposed to transport the earthlings to the planet of the creators.

The Elohim have the physical constitution of small people and they had personal contact with the descendants of the people they had created. They have been categorized over time as angels, cherubim, devils, gods or deities. The Raëlians believe that throughout history Elohim civilization has sent around 40 prophets – including Moses, Elijah, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad or Joseph Smith Jr. – to guide mankind and to prepare it for the future. All the

prophets were created through the sexual union between a woman and an Eloha (singular of Elohim). Later, the Elohim diminished the frequency of their visits so that mankind could freely evolve according to its own will and force. But on Judgment Day Elohim civilization will reveal itself to the entire world, it will open an embassy and it will establish political and economic relations with mankind. The nuclear explosion at Hiroshima signaled the entering of the world in the final age, the Apocalyptic Age, and Raël is its prophet, sent to prepare the world for the great contact. [991]

The alien phenomenon does not bring light on the understanding of life and of the Universe; it actually causes even more confusion. Besides the fact that the presence of aliens is supported, at least so far, by questionable evidence, their actions and messages are contradictory. The interest of extraterrestrial beings in human sexuality is far from being a novelty; otherworldly beings always have problems with procreation. They are constantly eager to enlarge their number with the help of human sap, hence their obsession with our fertility. In reality, not otherworldly beings, but we, the people, have a problem with the act of reproduction. Sex is one of our fundamental instincts. And sex, as the act of reproduction, is meant to assure the survival and improvement of the human species. We are programmed to choose partners that express health and better chances of survival through their physical appearance (beauty). The copulation between people and other species – animals, angels, fantastic beings or aliens – frequently mentioned in legends, fairy tales and alien encounters, reflects one of our greatest fears: the alteration and the failure of our species.

Of the ancient apocryphal texts, *the Book of Enoch* [992] depicts an immoral relationship between humans and depraved gods. The text was brought from Abyssinia (the ancient name of Ethiopia) in 1773 by the Scottish traveler James Bruce, and it has been a subject of controversy ever since:

> *1. And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. 2. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: 'Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.' 3. And Semjâzâ, who was their leader, said unto them: 'I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed,*

and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.' 4. And they all answered him and said: 'Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.' ... 1. And Azâzêl taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals [of the earth] and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures. 2. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed corrupt fornication, and they were led astray, and became corrupt in all their ways. [993]

A similar scenario is depicted in Genesis as well:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all that they chose. And Jehovah said, My spirit shall not strive with man for ever, for that he also is flesh: yet shall his days be a hundred and twenty years. The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them: the same were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown. And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented Jehovah that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart (Genesis 6:1-6).

The sexual act between earthlings and otherworldly beings is conditioned by two essential things. First, the reproductive organs of the two species must have an identical structure for the copulation to be possible. Second, even if there was copulation between humans and aliens, the natural procreation is not possible as long as there is a significant difference of DNA between species. Analogically, the copulation between a human being and a chimpanzee is possible, but the rough 5% DNA difference makes the procreation impossible.

UFO religions and the contactees preach that aliens are the real divinities and that a future official contact will have incommensurable benefits. With the help of otherworldly knowledge human beings will overcome the current

ecological, spiritual and social problems. Hate, war, corruption or poverty will be permanently eliminated and mankind will become part of a pre-existent intergalactic civilization. This is a millenarist vision because it depicts a golden age caused by the contact with alien civilizations. But the fanaticism, the suicides and the anti-social practices characteristic to UFO beliefs signal that something is very wrong. Utopia is impossible within a species with an unstable, even precarious, morality and behavior. And the alien morality is by no means more special compared to the human one. Aliens, like humans, hate, lie, kill, collude, love, they are afraid, aggressive, violent, they build finery, they prostitute themselves with human beings and fall into temptation, they like to rule and to exploit, power corrupts them, they are curious, incredulous, greedy, they are mortal and they are afraid of dying.

The current UFO culture contains descriptions of many alien species: green, blue, shiny, grey or white, bipeds or with multiple legs, tall or short, blonds, hairless or completely covered with hair or scales, naked or dressed in peculiar costumes, or beings that have no body at all, capable to materialize at will. The main feature of most of the alien species is the humanoid shape. In parallel, most religions and civilizations portrayed their deities in more or less human forms. These aspects converge toward the idea that deities, whether they are gods or aliens, did not create us in their own image, but we have portrayed them in our own image. The appearance of aliens and gods are reflections of the aspirations we, the people, have regarding our own body. The humanoid form reflects our fundamental belief that man is the ultimate creature, situated at the top of the food chain and the apogee of evolution. All the amazing things aliens possess reflect the idea that technological progress will help us build a utopia, it will help us take control of our own destiny and to defeat once and for all our greatest enemy: death.

Aliens are a frame in which humans vomit their thoughts, desires or fears. Aliens, like gods, can take whatever shape we want to take. They are often portrayed as evil and involved in unlawful actions such as kidnappings, biological experiments on humans, sexual assaults or plots. In this case people fear aliens because they imagine aliens treating us the same way we have treated each other. For example, in 1999 the English paranoid David Icke invented the alien species of the reptilians – a caricature of our ancestral

and cultural fear and repulsion regarding reptiles. The snake, for example, is seen as the embodiment of evil because of the real danger it represents, but also due to the fact that it deceived Eve to bite from the apple in Eden. Starting from this fear, Icke has the merit of creating a conspiratorial trend involving reptilians disguised as politicians, bankers, Jews or scientists whose sole purpose is to subdue or to destroy us. [994]

The religious paradigm, whether we like it or not, changes. But this thing comes at a price: the fear of loneliness and the nonsense. The concept of God – as faulty as it has been – served both as a cause and as a purpose of the human existence. Humanity needs points of reference in order to provide a meaning to its existence. And UFO religions come to fill the void left by the collapse of mysticism and to satisfy our ancestral needs. We accept the fact that life might be a chemical accident, but the prospect of loneliness causes terror and despair, which sometimes forces the mind to forge revelations or alien encounters. We want to believe that the arbitrariness that gave birth to life on Earth manifested itself in other parts of the Universe as well. But it is somehow irrelevant if we find cats and dogs on other planets. We are not searching for any kind of alien life, but for intelligent alien life. Mankind wants to establish contacts with otherworldly intelligent beings not necessarily for a technological leap, but due to the need to have something to compare itself to. Who are we? Why are we here? Despite our cultural and technological achievements, we are still a mystery to ourselves. But we hope that we will find the answers to this kind of questions at aliens. The alien “toys” are dispensable because sooner or later we will discover them ourselves. The human species is not yet capable to provide for itself a purpose. So, we have to import one. What we really want to find out from aliens is if our existence has a purpose or not, and what that purpose is.

3. THE GOOD EMPIRE VERSUS THE EVIL EMPIRE

There is a major difference between the American exceptionalism formulated by Winthrop and the current American exceptionalism. The Puritan from *Arbella* explained American exceptionalism on religious grounds. Instead, in the 20th century the concept came to rely on political, geographic and social arguments. The American nation is special because it is a mosaical association of people who have in common the need for freedom, democracy, republicanism, rule of law, civic virtue, private property and constitutional government. Ever since their conception, the American policies have followed a system of federalism, examinations and balances meant to prevent any person, faction, region or governmental body to become too powerful.

At the moment, American exceptionalism is a multifunctional political instrument. Patriotism is the civil religion of America; it has been used both offensively, to civilize the world according to America's ideals, and defensively, as a shield against communism. The rivalry between the United States and Russia exists since the First World War. Immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, American society lived the First Red Scare – a nation-wide hysteria regarding the imminence of a communist transformation. The Americans feared that, following the wave of worldwide communist revolutions, their country was on the brink of a proletarian uprising that would change the American values and lifestyle. At its height, in 1919-1920, concerns regarding the spread of communism and anarchism among American labor movements fueled a general sense of paranoia, further exacerbated by newspapers into xenophobia. [995]

After the Second World War the world was split into two spheres of influence, characterized by two opposed ideologies: democracy and communism. This context triggered the Second Red Scare, lasting roughly between 1947 and 1956. The fear of communism and American traitors was brutally aggravated by the Berlin Blockade of 1948, the confessions of spying for the Soviets given by several government officials in 1949, the

Chinese communists winning the Chinese Civil War, and later the Chinese intervention in the Korean War (1950-1953) against South Korea, America's ally. During the Second Red Scare thousands of Americans were accused of being communists or communist sympathizers and became the subject of aggressive investigations.

At international level, the rivalry between the two superpowers triggered the Cold War – one of the most dangerous periods in human history. The world just came out of the Second World War and there was already the prospect of the Third World War. And, to make matters worse, the end of the Second World War brought a major change in war tactics: the atomic bomb. The world entered the nuclear age and there was no turning back. One single mistake and the consequences could have been unimaginable. In reaction to this state of things, the famous physicist Albert Einstein stated: "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." [996] Similarly, in 1947 the experts from the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* magazine of the University of Chicago instituted the so-called "Doomsday Clock" – a symbolic reference point that has the purpose to show how close the world is to self-destruction. In 1947, at the start of the Cold War, the clock was set at 23:53, seven minutes before midnight – the symbol for global disaster. Ever since the clock has been repeatedly readjusted by the directors of the magazine in order to correspond to reality. Initially, the clock was meant to reflect only the increase or decrease of the nuclear threat; but since 2007 it has depicted how close mankind is to extinction in general, regardless of cause. From its establishment in 1947 until 2018 the clock was adjusted 24 times. Between 1953 and 1960 the clock was set at 23:58 – the closest setting to the end of the world. During that period both the United States and the Soviet Union conducted thermonuclear experiments. The farthest setting of the clock was between 1991 and 1995, at 23:43, when the United States and the Soviet Union signed the *Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty* . In 2018 the clock was set at 23:58 due to the nuclear threat, risk of conflict and global warming. [997]

In 1860 the English John Cumming analyzed the international situation of his time and came to the conclusion that Russia is Gog described by Ezekiel in 38:15-16, which one day would assault Palestine. [998] One hundred years later the American exegetes were preaching the same thing: the Soviet Union was

“definitely” the great power of the north which would gather all nations under its umbrella for the Battle of Armageddon. As an American it was easy to compare the political antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union with the ancestral battle between good and evil. The most popular American apocalyptic scenario portrayed a Soviet and Arab attack against Israel, America’s reaction and the start of the Third World War. The final battle was believed to literally take place on Mount Megiddo (Romanized Hebrew: *Har Magiddô*), in the southwestern Sea of Galilee. [999]

The Vietnam War, between 1955 and 1975, was another major trauma to American culture. Although it was carried out on foreign land, the war was an indirect collision between the Eastern powers, which supported the communist North Vietnam, and the Western powers, which supported the democratic South Vietnam. So, the natural question was if this was going to degenerate into a direct conflict between the two political blocks and precede Armageddon. An article in *The King’s Business* magazine assured the readers that this thing would not happen, but it explained the prophetic significance of the crisis:

> *Well, for one thing, we are feeling intensely the threat of Red China. We have seen the development of the great northern power Russia. Egypt is presently a developed power engulfed in an Arab alliance. We are witnessing the development of a great western confederacy in the form of a European Common Market. And now we are faced with the recognition of a vast Eastern power that is not only communistic but also atheistic. Is not the stage set? [1000]*

As long as the Iron Curtain stood up, the American religious mosaic was a chaotic mass that served as a fertile soil for religious experimentation and the rise of the Doomsday Cults. Faced with the real possibility that there might not be a tomorrow, people searched for answers regarding the crisis, personal future or God’s plans for America. Some, such as Arthur Blessitt, [1001] sought to redeem themselves by preaching the gospel and doing good deeds. Others, such as the pedophile Leland Jensen, [1002] prophesied about nuclear holocausts. And others prepared themselves with money; lots of money. It may sound cynical, but the Cold War was a great opportunity for business. Although the idea of apocalypse has generated profits since the time of John

Winthrop, the nuclear threat put an industry of apocalypse on its feet, both at public and private levels. Between 1950 and 1990 the American government invested hundreds of billions of dollars in building underground tunnels, bunkers and all sorts of special facilities (such as the Cheyenne Mountain Complex). Similarly, American citizens took the problem of survival into their own hands, without waiting for the support of the authorities. At the beginning of the 1960s the survivalist movement (better known as "doomsday preppers") appeared, which consists of storage of food and water, bunker building, personal arming, acquiring equipment of special protection, combat training or survival skills development. This trend, despite the high costs and contextual changes, has continued to be practiced to this day, long after the end of the Cold War. In 2012 National Geographic Channel made a reality television series on this topic entitled *Doomsday Preppers* , [1003] and ir 2014 the Mormon Church still advised its members to be prepared with a stock of food and water for one year. [1004] And, unlike the first generations of doomsday preppers, the generations of the 21st century prepare themselves for the most various and wildest apocalyptic scenarios: alien invasions, geomagnetic reversal, nuclear holocaust, pandemics or even zombie apocalypse.

The apocalyptic fear has been a gold mine for the intellectual property as well. A choir of preachers, biblical scholars, fanatics and journalists extorted the masses through books, magazines and various materials on this topic. In *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), sold in more than 22 million copies, Hal Lindsey stated that Armageddon would be a nuclear war that would take place 40 years after the establishment of the state of Israel, in 1998. [1005] In 1980 Lindsey also published *Countdown to Armageddon* , in which he completed the first prophecy by saying that the United States of Europe is the revived Roman Empire – a key element of the end scenario. [1006] In 1979 Colin Deal published *Christ Returns by 1988: 101 Reasons Why* . Although it was ironically described as "one of the most astounding books of the generation," the work sold hundreds of thousands of copies. Edgar Whisenant's *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will be in 1988* did even better: it opened the wallets of more than four million credulous. After 1988 passed uneventfully, Whisenant published three other books equally "original" and "surprising," machine-gunning the end in 1989, 1993 and 1994. [1007] Another "amazing" book was Grant Jeffrey's *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny*

(1988). But the destiny Jeffrey speaks about can be modified: “God is sovereign and may accelerate or postpone ‘the time appointed’.” [1008] In other words, Jeffrey subtly admitted that his calculations regarding the year 2000 were nothing but speculations.

Fortunately, the only places a global nuclear war has been fought are in expert scenarios, games, art, film and literature. After the Second World War, when the possibility of global annihilation by nuclear weapons entered the public consciousness, apocalyptic fiction turned into a feasible genre both in terms of literature and cinema. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* , George Orwell’s famous dystopian 1949 novel about the life after a third world war, rose to cultural prominence during the Second Red Scare. In it, the world has endured a massive atomic war and is politically divided into three totalitarian superstates. Hollywood, through its productions, exploited the collective fears much more efficiently than literature. Since 1950 America’s entertainment industry poured out dozens of productions about frightening apocalypses and post-apocalyptic worlds. The *Mad Max* franchise (started in 1979) enjoyed a tremendous success, while *The Day After* (1983) has been the highest-rated television film in history, seen by more than 100 million people at the moment of its debut. [1009]

Not even the highest authorities were immune to the apocalyptic fear. Ronald Reagan, the president of the United States between 1980 and 1988, shared the beliefs of his fellow countrymen. In 1971 Reagan, when he commented about the events in Libya, said that “for the first time ever, everything is in place for the Battle of Armageddon and the second coming of Christ.” Then, the televangelist Jim Baker cited Reagan in 1981, who had said: “We may be the generation that sees Armageddon.” [1010] And in 1983 the president called the Soviet Union the “Evil Empire” and described the potential nuclear war as the “age old struggle between good and evil.” [1011]

But, no matter what happens in a certain state or on a certain territory, there are no evil empires or good empires, as there are no absolutely good people or absolutely bad people. There are only good or wrong ideologies, which gather under their umbrella different kinds of people. Religion was indeed an aspect that sharpened even more the differences between the East and the West. Communists saw religion as an intellectual refuge and a threat to the

status quo . Therefore, they attempted to eradicate it by force and replace it with patriotism. America, on the other hand, has been at the other extreme: it took the form of a religious supermarket, where religious beliefs are tested and consumed as any other commercial product. There is no official record of all religious groups, but the Hartford Institute estimates that America hosts over 300,000 religious congregations. Nobody can pinpoint the exact number due to the vast territory of the United States and the religious mobility; there are undeclared groups, others exist only on paper, and the establishment and the dissolution of a community can be a matter of days. The religious reorientations of the Americans are greater than anywhere in the world. More than a quarter of the American adults have changed at least once their belief or they have become atheists. [1012]

Besides the nuclear threat, American society had another reason of fear: racial segregation. In the 1960s the tensions between whites and blacks was close to degenerate into a civil war. On the East Coast of America the black pastor Martin Luther King Jr. attempted to solve the problem through tolerance, non-violent protests and speeches. On the West Coast, in California, Charles Manson had an entirely different opinion. Believing that he was the incarnation of Christ, Manson gathered a small group of hippies to trigger what he called “Helter Skelter” – an imminent apocalyptic interracial war described by the band the Beatles on their ninth studio album. In 1969 Manson’s group committed horrible homicides in order to induce a state of general revolt and the escalation of the interracial tensions up to the outbreak of the nuclear world war. Posterior to this conflagration his group was supposed to come out from its hiding place in the desert and initiate a new age. Instead, the entire group was arrested and sentenced to life in prison and Manson became an icon of insanity and violence, irretrievably linked to hippie culture. [1013]

Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, a UFO fanatic and an anti-white, had in mind a similar scenario. He stated that between 1965 and 1966 an interracial war would burst in America, it would have global effects and the blacks would come out as winners. In reality, the 1960s proved to be extremely tumultuous and violent, but within this period important steps were made toward the creation of an adequate civil system. Later, in 1991 Louis Farrakhan, Muhammad’s successor, stated that the Gulf War started by the

United States against Saddam Hussein's Iraq would end with the Battle of Armageddon. [1014]

The black Hulon Mitchell Jr., better known as "Yahweh ben Yahweh," was close to become a second Charles Manson. In 1979 he established the cult Nation of Yahweh in Florida and began to preach about the supremacy of the black race. Ben Yahweh stated that he was the Messiah of the black race, that God and all the prophets of the Bible were black, and that the black people would gain the true knowledge at the end of times. In 1991 Ben Yahweh was found guilty of conspiracy to murder, instigation to violence and racial discrimination. [1015]

Good is good only when it is compared to evil, and evil is evil only when it is compared to good. American exceptionalism needs ideological rivals to highlight it and the rhetoric changes depending on the context. At the beginning of the 1990s the Soviet Union collapsed, the Cold War ended and a large part of the American apocalyptic scenarios automatically became obsolete. Yet, a new confrontation between Western and Oriental civilizations immediately began. In 1990 Kuwait was invaded by Iraqi troops. Even though Iraq cannot be compared with Russia in terms of power and influence, the turbulences from the Middle East were immediately seen as the prelude of Armageddon. Saddam Hussein was suddenly seen as the Antichrist that would unite the Arab world under his command against America. In the 11th issue of the *Charisma and Christian Life* magazine Wallace Henley identified the symbolic Babylon with the literal one, the ancient capital of Iraq. Likewise, Pat Robertson adapted his theology to the current context:

> *Until very recently, I had always felt that Babylon was merely a symbol. Until the Saddam Hussein affair, I never felt that anything would actually bring the power of the entire world to physical Babylon. But this is the era when we should expect the unexpected! … Saddam Hussein has set the machinery in motion which one day will bring the military force of the world government against Israel.* [1016]

During the 1990s Neal Chase made 18 prophecies about disasters and nuclear attacks caused by terrorists from the Middle East. For Chase, Saddam Hussein was the Antichrist who was about to start the Third World War.

Chase based his statements on biblical prophecies, the prophecies of the Hopi Amerindians, planetary conjunctions, numerological coincidences, Nostradamus and various visions and signs. [1017]

Ned Dougherty was even more ludicrous. Allegedly, beginning with 1984, the Virgin Mary and Michael the Archangel revealed to him a series of unoriginal, vague and inconsistent prophecies, which cover the entire world and all the possible and probable apocalyptic scenarios. Of the multitude of prophetic aberrations, the critique of Michael the Archangel regarding the decaying state of American society amazingly resembles John Winthrop's sermon:

> *Your forefathers created one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all. These were men of high ideals, spiritually guided and inspired to create a nation and a civilization to be admired and respected, to set an example for the rest of the world. ... Yet, God created a nation of high ideals for you to survive other empires and civilizations that crumbled into oblivion, for their leaders placed themselves as men above God, and now those empires and civilizations are but piles of dust or buried under the waters. You sit on the edge of the new millennium, poised for the future of mankind, and you are headed, as all great civilizations of the past to be reduced to piles of dust, to be covered over by the waters!* *[1018]*

The concept of American exceptionalism was abstracted from its historical and religious context and the modern Americans no longer share Winthrop's vision. An aspect, however, remained unchanged: the idea that the other nations have to choose between "with us or against us," but also that America is the beginning and the end of history.

William Miller and the preachers of the awakenings saw America as a realm of spiritual redemption; now America is rather a realm of material redemption. In theory, the American meritocracy allows individuals to financially expand without being restrained by family, geographic, cultural or historical barriers. This aspiration is frequently called the "American Dream." The military and economic power provides a favorable climate for winnings and financial apogees: the richest men in the world, the largest casinos, the best cars, the best products, the best movies – everything happens in

America. So, even though almost 400 years have passed since the John Winthrop's sermon, American exceptionalism still stands due to the economic opportunities America offers.

American exceptionalism is often associated with jingoism, [1019] self-serving [1020] or extreme nationalism. Slavery, racial segregation in the South, the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands and of some Mexican territories by force, the poverty in the ghettos, the unequal quality of health care and education, and the genocide and the dislocation of Native Americans, the "Western betrayal" [1021] or starting wars in the Middle East for oil exploitation are social and historical details that contradict the ideas of equality and freedom. America, like any other empire, was built on bloodshed and greed. And the assumption that America acts for the good of mankind is a sure path toward moral corruption. [1022]

Today, the largest promoter of American exceptionalism is the entertainment industry, especially Hollywood. In fiction, America saves the world from alien invasions, it saves the human species from extinction, it has the power to prevent global catastrophes, it wins wars that were lost in the real world, it has the best things, the best ideas, and holds the best people and the most efficient institutions. The American hero is the embodiment of good, health, beauty, wisdom and kindness – an image that defies and insults the common, obese and poorly educated American. Entertainment industry (music and film) is in fact what distinguishes the United States from other empires of the world; America does not expand territorially, but ideologically. America uses its military power not to effectively occupy territories, but to secure its influence and the necessary resources by exploiting various places of the world. It aggressively promotes its values abroad through its material and intellectual products. Due to these reasons, many smaller nations feel that their cultural identity is destroyed by the "bombardment" of the capitalist values and, accordingly, they develop a sense of adversity toward America or Western culture as a whole.

Naturally, every individual and group of people want to satisfy the ancestral desire of being unique, superior and exceptional in relation to others. But every society and nation has a unique history, culture, geography, demography and social structure. Hence, the idea that the United States is

superior only due to its unique features is overrated. The status of superpower of the United States, frequently mentioned by supporters of American exceptionalism, is rather an accident of history than a manifestation of destiny. All the current international problems require cooperation between states, which makes American exceptionalism seem a nostalgic and superfluous concept. Besides, history has shown many times that exceptionalism, of any kind, has a very destructive potential, being used to justify aggressive actions upon others. In the Old Testament the Jews wiped out neighboring people on the ground that they were God's chosen people; the current Greeks can consider themselves exceptional because their ancient culture sits at the basis of current European culture; the Romans lived under the impression that through conquering they were bringing civilization to the barbarous people; and last but not least, Hitler used the propaganda of the superiority of the Aryan race to set in motion the German war machine.

The irony of fate is that in only a couple of decades America turned from the savior of mankind into a possible executioner. The American Dream is more than meritocracy; it is the icon and the promise of a life of luxury and abundance. Until the beginning of the 2000s the American Dream was aggressively promoted by the media as an ideal lifestyle. But the financial crisis of 2009, global warming and the increasing need for energy demolished the American myth. In the 21st century the United States became the icon of excessive entertainment, ignorance, pollution, waste and intellectual prostitution. Empires and civilizations from the past, believed to be invincible, collapsed exactly because they invested their energy and resources in entertainment and pleasures. And today there are premises that point toward a similar conclusion, but on a much larger and darker scale. Mankind is investing too much in entertainment and too little in research and solving its problems. Most nations want to live the American Dream of abundance on their own lands. But the planet cannot support a high level of civilization for a population of seven billion; or at least not with the current culture of waste and technologies based on fossil fuels (coal, petroleum and natural gas). The more we consume, the more we destroy our environment, we increase global warming and ultimately we endanger our existence as a species. And there is nothing exceptional in digging our own grave.

4. DOOMSDAY CULTS

The expression “doomsday cult” was coined in 1966 by John Lofland through his study *Doomsday Cult: A Study of Conversion, Proselytization, and Maintenance of Faith* . According to Lofland, there are several aspects which indicate the presence of a doomsday cult: the feeling of an acute tension, a controlled religious search, a turning point, the neutralization of the connections between cult members and external elements, the literal application of biblical prophecy, withdrawal from society, irrational behavior under the influence of paranoid leaders, and the belief that they act on divine command. By practicing a radical millenarism dominated by a terrifying vision of the end, a doomsday cult comes to wage a veritable jihad against the Babylonian society. [1023]

Any group obsessed with apocalypticism has the potential to derail into a doomsday cult. The difference between doomsday cults and the other apocalyptic cults consists in the murderous conduct. Violence or death, which often reverberate upon its own members, are always portrayed as a protest against the decayed world and its ineptitude to prevent God’s wrath. At least for Jim Jones, the leader of the People’s Temple, the mass suicide did not have the significance of a common, degrading suicide, but of a glorious escape from the corrupted world. Started in the 1950s in Indianapolis as an urban mission of tolerance and interracial harmony, the People’s Temple gradually turned into a doomsday cult until the beginning of the 1970s. Although it promoted controversial ideas, the hippie libertinism and California’s progressive climate helped Jones enjoy a tremendous success. [1024] From 80 members in the spring of 1966, through organized itinerant sermons Jones’s utopia came to number several thousands in only five years.

Under the pretext that he and his church were persecuted due to the interracial policies, [1025] Jones shifted three times the cult’s headquarters: first from Indianapolis to Ukiah, California, then in San Francisco, and ultimately in the jungle of Guyana, a small and densely wooded country in Northwestern South America. In reality, Jones was obsessed with the fact that the Cold War would turn into the Third World War. He searched for an adequate place to survive the nuclear Armageddon and to build a communist Eden, far from the long arm of American authorities.

In 1977, when hundreds of members were simply exiled in the utopian

settlement Jonestown in Guyana, most of them were already separated from families, relatives and friends. [1026] They had become totally dependent on Jones and the relations they had established within the cult. This allowed Jones, isolated in the jungle and far from the restraints of any authority, to turn Jonestown into a concentration camp. No one was allowed to leave and members became the subjects of a brainwashing and abusive regime. They were often forced to take part in rehearsals of collective suicide: they were woken up in the middle of the night at the sound of the alarm, they were told that they were under attack and they had to drink a cocktail of juice, alcohol and poison. [1027] Finally, on November 18, 1978, in what Jones called "an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhumane world," [1028] over 900 residents of Jonestown, of whom 276 were children, died shot or poisoned with cyanide. It was one of the largest mass suicides in history and the greatest loss of American civilian life in a non-natural disaster until the attacks of September 11, 2001.

What happened in Jonestown was not a revolutionary, respectable or inspiring death, but a waste of life and a suicidal massacre instrumented by a delirious mind. And the same thing happened in the case of the Order of the Solar Temple. Started by Joseph Di Mambro and Luc Joret in 1984 in Geneva, the Order of the Solar Temple took the form of a secret society based on the ideas of the British occultist Aleister Crowley and the modern myth of the continuation of the existence of the Knights Templar. The group aimed, among many other things, to prepare mankind for the Second Coming of Christ and to unify Christianity and Islam in a single religion.

Initially, Joret had in mind the establishment of a utopia, in protest against the polluted and degenerate society. But when the world refused salvation (as imagined by any paranoid leader), the only option left was destruction, of the world or of themselves. In a gesture of pure insanity, in October 1994 the three-month-old infant of the adherent Tony Dutoit was killed at the center of the group at Morin-Heights, Canada. The baby was stabbed several times with a wooden spike at Di Mambro's order, who identified him with the Antichrist. A couple of days later Di Mambro and his followers had a supper that imitated the Last Supper of Jesus Christ and his apostles before the Crucifixion. At Morin-Heights 15 members committed suicide by poisoning, 30 were killed by shooting or suffocation, and another eight died of other

causes. At the center of the sect from Switzerland bodies were found in a secret underground chapel coated with mirrors and filled with objects with Templar symbolism. These were dressed in ceremonial clothes and placed in circle, with the heads toward the exterior, covered with plastic bags; all were shot in the head. The farewell letters found on them expressed the same idea: the suicide was a release from the hypocrisy and the oppression of the world. [1029]

The case of the Order of the Solar Temple shows that technology changed the religious dynamics, allowing the groups to be infinitely more malleable than in the past. The means of communication helps ideas find adherents in the most remote places. Hence, the concept of extremist group separated from the decayed society no longer requires a physical closeness between its members, but only an intellectual intimacy.

Less known is the case of Woo Jong-min, but the outcome was the same. On October 5, 1998, seven people, including Woo, were found burned to death in a mini-van in South Korea. Initially, Woo told his followers that they were going to embark on an eternal trip and they would have a happy life after death. [1030] Likewise, the members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments committed mass suicide in Kanungu, Uganda, after failed prophecies regarding the year 2000. [1031]

In fortunate cases the aberrant actions of the leader or the reaction of the authorities dissolves the group before coming to bloodshed. In the 1980s Elizabeth Clare Prophet, the leader of the Summit Lighthouse, prophesied a nuclear devastation on April 23, 1990, which was going to last 12 years, until the coming of Christ. Her followers sold their properties and moved with Prophet to Montana. Sheltered in so-called nuclear bunkers, these expected the end of the world armed to the teeth. But the illegal possession of guns caught the attention of the authorities and a part of the fanatics were arrested by federal agents. [1032]

While some members leave the organization after a failed prophecy or cause schisms that lead to the formation of new groups, others feel their belief and loyalty strengthened. The loyal followers rationalize the initial failure through ludicrous explanations and they dedicate themselves to the apocalyptic cause with a renewed vigor. When the prophecy of the flood proved to be false,

Marian Keech, the leader of the UFO cult Brotherhood of the Seven Rays, came up with a brilliant explanation: their strong belief had made God change his mind and so they prevented the end of the world. [1033]

The violent tendencies of doomsday cults can be defensive or offensive. In general, these agents of instability prefer to stay hidden in their pathetic little bubble, from where they happily wait the collapse of civilization. So, defensive violence is utilized by cults to defend a compound or enclave that was specifically created to eliminate contact with the dominant culture. Such was the case of the cult Branch Davidians, an offscouring of Seventh-day Adventism. [1034] Situated near Waco, Texas, the Davidian sect was established in the 1930s as a peaceful expectation of Parousia. Only in the 1980s, when it came under the leadership of David Koresh, the sect took a grim aura. [1035]

Unlike his predecessors, Koresh, a failed semi-illiterate guitarist, had totally different ideas about how the issue of the apocalypse should be approached. Guided by this rabid Messiah, the gathering of almost 100 people, including children, no longer waited the end of the world by praying and singing psalms, but by looking through the barrel of the gun. From 1989 until 1993 the group acquired an arsenal of weapons and ammunition in preparation for Armageddon. By an unfortunate coincidence, the federal authorities became concerned about the sect's activities and organized a raid on February 28, 1993. In this way, an operation which was supposed to be routine instantly turned into guerrilla warfare with cosmic significance. Without any warning the government troops were welcomed with gusts of bullets, a couple of members and federal agents being killed in the gunfight. The authorities preferred to put the Davidian fortress (which was a farm) under siege and not to assault it in order to avoid additional bloodshed. There were even fears of a possible mass suicide, because Koresh prophesied that the Kingdom of God would be installed on Earth only after the sacrifice of 200 million martyrs, including himself and his followers. [1036] After 51 days and countless failed negotiations, the complex was assaulted with tanks, armored vehicles and helicopters. During the attack 76 Davidians, including Koresh, died burned, suffocated by smoke, shot or preferred to commit suicide. [1037]

What distinguishes Koresh from other messiahs is the epiphany he had in

Jerusalem. In 1985, before he took the control of the cult, Koresh (who at the time was named “Vernon Howell”) made a six-month visit to Jerusalem to investigate if the Temple can shelter the 144,000 people according to Revelation 7:1-4 and 14:5. The Holy Land was the catalyst that turned Koresh from an end-time prophet into the returned Messiah. According to his own accounts, he was raised to Heaven, in trance, like the author of Revelation, where all prophetic secrets were revealed to him. From that moment on he completely understood the Bible and he identified himself with the seventh trumpet from Revelation 10 and with the reincarnation of Cyrus, the king who freed the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity. Koresh returned from Jerusalem an entirely different man. [1038]

But, surprisingly, Koresh’s case is not unique. Occasionally, some of those who visit Palestine become convinced that they are Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, King David, God or Satan. This is a psychological phenomenon known to the psychiatrists of the area, who studied it and called it the “Jerusalem syndrome.” According to Eliezer Witzum, professor of psychiatry, the attack of the disease is instantaneous. The phenomenon is triggered by the mental meeting between the historical and religious significance of the place and the memories of a very religious childhood, trauma, mystical events or even the revolt against faith. For those who go to the desert, the meditation, the physical discomfort and the isolation subliminally suggest Christ’s 40 days of fasting, the refuge of John the Baptist or the journey of the Israelites. Dehydration, fever or lack of sleep can easily induce hallucinations. The unique atmosphere combines with beliefs deeply buried in the psyche of the individual, unsolved anxieties, utopian aspirations or inner conflicts and cause the onset of the syndrome. It manifests through behavioral oddities such as flagellation, spontaneous preaching, self-castration, a sense of isolation and disconnection from reality, an obsession for purity, an obsession for identifying divine signs, codes or hidden messages in the most trivial or strange objects: clouds, fire, Sun, water, TV images. [1039]

The doomsday cults that use offensive violence pour their destructive energy toward outside not to destroy the world, but to renew it according to their own aspirations. For these, the violent event is an apocalypse for nonbelievers and a day of redemption for the members. In fact, every single

doomsday cult or apocalyptic sect wants the world to end, but imagines itself witnessing the burning of all the others from a safe and comfortable place. Naturally, the century-old fanatic religiosity of the United States is the source of most of the visionary leaders who led their followers toward a personal apocalypse. Yet, the best-known sect for using offensive violence came from Japan.

In 1987 Shoko Asahara, a pseudo-instructor of yoga and meditation, established the basis of the cult *Aum Shinrikyo* (written in Romanized Japanese), which can be translated as "Supreme Truth." [1040] Presenting itself as a mixture of Christianity, Buddhism, yoga and communism, Aum promised spiritual healing, positive thinking, body healing, improving intelligence and even superpowers. This propaganda helped the "religion of the elites," as it was dubbed, attract many brilliant youngsters from top universities [1041] and to enjoy the fastest growth in the history of Japan: from dozens of members in 1984 to almost 9,000 in Japan and over 40,000 worldwide in 1995. But behind closed doors the members were guinea pigs for experiments and rituals that included the use of hallucinogens, brutal ascetic practices and brainwashing procedures. [1042]

With thousands of supporters and millions of dollars at hand, the megalomaniac ambitions of Asahara, briefly headed toward politics. In 1990 he and other 24 members ran in the general elections for a seat in the Japanese Parliament. It was a humiliating failure which profoundly hurt the ego of this blind messiah and made the philosophy of the organization very hostile. [1043] Asahara accused the government of manipulating the elections, said that the United States was the apocalyptic beast that would attack Japan, it would trigger the Third World War and the world would end in 1997 engulfed in a nuclear Armageddon. The only way to survive was to join the sect, which posterior to the conflagration was supposed to establish the Millennium. [1044]

From 1989 to 1995 an Aum elite of several hundred people, under Asahara's guidance and approval, conducted extortions, assassinations and terrorist attacks. Anyone who was seen as a threat became a living target for the fanatic arm of the sect. Such actions attracted the attention of the authorities, which prepared a simultaneous raid at several Aum locations. It is not known

if Asahara ordered the sarin gas attack to deflect the attention of the authorities from his cult or to overthrow the Japanese government and to trigger the Third World War. In any case, on the morning of March 20, 1995, Aum members released sarin gas in a coordinated attack on five lines of the Tokyo subway, killing 12 commuters, seriously injuring 54 and affecting around 1,000. Then, on the 5th of May, when most of the leaders of the sect had already been arrested and others were on the run, a burning paper was found in a toilet from Shinjuku station in Tokyo, the busiest in the world. The paper was imbued with hydrogen cyanide which, had it not been extinguished in time, would have released enough gas in the ventilation system to potentially kill thousands of people. And on the 16th of May, on the day Asahara was captured, a parcel bomb was sent to the Tokyo city hall in an attempt to kill the governor, who had declared that he would revoke Aum's status as a religion. [1045]

It may sound cynical, but it is likely that the subway attack prevented an even more devastating incident. Only after the annihilation of the sect did Japanese society come to see Asahara's real ambitions. Jones's brigades or Koresh's minions used conventional firearms, easy to manipulate. They aimed to defend themselves from the forces of darkness until the direct intervention of God. Instead, Asahara used the financial power of the organization to directly cause the end of the world. At the sect's locations the authorities found millions of dollars, cells with prisoners, evidence about previous assassinations and an arsenal of biochemical weapons: Ebola cultures, the sarin agent, advanced VX agents of neuronal stimulation, killing diseases such as Q fever and anthrax, the LSD drug, methamphetamine and an unsuccessful form of truth serum. In terms of firearms, Aum tried to assemble its own line of gun production, acquired massive amounts of explosives, a Russian military helicopter and even tried purchasing an atomic bomb. [1046]

No group is established as a doomsday cult, but it evolves into such a cult under the influence of a mentally challenged leader. The leader is the heart of a cult. He inspires power and influence and he identifies himself with the Messiah or with an important end-time prophet. He brings knowledge about new ways of redemption and news about imminent disasters. In this way the psyches of the individuals and of the leader enter in a relation of symbiosis:

while the adulation of the followers feeds the ego of the false messiah, the latter takes the responsibility of redeeming them. The leader controls the concepts of the individual, inhibits mental freedom and suppresses critical thinking. For him, the obedience of the followers is like a drug; it is never enough, he always needs more.

Sectarian communities are subhuman social organizations, grotesquely masked by a grandiose message. The control of the cult is based on the use of fear. The fear of God's wrath constrains the individuals to remain inside the cult to be part of those exempted from experiencing the prophesied terrifying events. But because the leader is seen as the instrument of God, spiritual salvation is not a question of ethics, but of endurance to abuses. Anything is allowed when you think that you represent God. Jim Jones forced his adherents to confess their mistakes in front of the congregation, only to have a reason to publicly humiliate them. [1047] Roch Theriault, dubbed the "Savage Messiah," got a life sentence after he amputated the right arm of a follower, cut the abdomen of a woman and pulled out a part of her bowels. [1048] And David Koresh punished the dissidents by sleep and food deprivation, forced labor or severe beatings.

The propensity to violence is often accompanied by sexual abuse – a method through which the leaders aim to create a personal, intimate and dominating bond with their subjects. Messiahs seem to have a problem with sex. Jones forbade sex between unmarried followers, but he voraciously engaged in sexual relations with members of both genders. [1049] When he was 19 Koresh had a relationship with a 15-year-old girl who got pregnant. [1050] Koresh was suspected of having sexual relations even with Lois Roden, the 70-year-old former leader of the Davidians. The two had to conceive the future Messiah through a miracle as in the case of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18; 21). [1051] After he took the control of the Davidians, Koresh annulled all the marriages and claimed exclusive access to women. God, allegedly, had asked him to establish the "House of David," a superior and pure human race that would populate the new Paradise. Koresh fathered 14 children, some of the mothers being only 12 years old. The obsession for purity quickly triggers pedophilic tendencies. In 1995 Kiri Jewell confessed that she was only 10 years old when Koresh sexually molested her, after which he read for her from the Bible. [1052] And in 2008 Wayne Bent, the messiah of the Lord Our

Righteousness Church, claimed that God told him to have sex with seven virgin girls of the congregation. [1053]

Ironically, the messiahs of doomsday cults perceive themselves as the only people with lucid minds in the world, but they manifest obvious symptoms of paranoia. While Jim Jones publicly spoke about the virtues of the social gospel, behind the scenes he consumed drugs and he despotically controlled his adherents. Amid the assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, Jones often said that his life and his church were threatened by evil exterior forces. In order to test the loyalty of his followers, one day he made all those attending the sermon drink a beverage prepared in advance, after which he told them that it had been poisoned and they would all die together. [1054] Likewise, Asahara's public mission was to take upon him the sins of the world and to offer spiritual powers. But the political and social failures made him see Jewish, American, Freemason, British or Japanese conspiracies everywhere. [1055]

The unstable character of a messiah may be the result of pure insanity, of a personal tragedy or especially of a traumatizing childhood. Messiahs never admit they are wrong because this contradicts the immaculate image they have of themselves. The adulation they need covers in fact their greatest fear, that of being rejected or being faulty. The act of rejection reactivates repressed feelings of abandonment, neglect, disappointment and totally changes their vision of the world: mercy turns into hate, salvation into destruction and peace into war. Their aversion to society is a retaliation against the society and the dysfunctional families that made them suffer. The "decadent" society must be cleansed not because it is indeed decadent, but because it is decadent in relation to their person. For them, the perfect society can only be the one in which they receive the much-needed acceptance. Jones grew up in a poor family, with a drunken and unemployed father and a mother always gone to work. All his later actions reveal the desire to change the world that made him suffer: he joined the Communist Party, he identified himself with America's enemies and racial tolerance was a revolt against his father, a member of Ku Klux Klan. [1056] Koresh never met his father, and his mother cohabited with a violent alcoholic. A strange and lonely character, it is believed that at the age of eight Koresh was raped by a gang of older children. Below average in school and diagnosed with dyslexia, he was

placed at first in a special school, and then he abandoned education at the age of 17. Both Jones and Koresh found refuge in religion. [1057]

It is no secret that religions exert a certain control over their adherents. But cults take this control to a whole new level. Leaving the cult is never easy; cults are structures of power that allure and trap people. Their propaganda suggests that people should be able to think for themselves, but behind closed doors members are told exactly *how* and *what* they have to think. In order to obtain spiritual satisfaction, the adherents accept a matrix of thought that is not their own and lock up a good portion of their own minds. This process enables the leaders to penetrate deeply into the lives of their subjects, asking their material values and their secrets as a guarantee of loyalty. The abandonment of the corrupt world and the embracing of the pure world of sectarianism marks the beginning of a period of manipulation, violence and terror. The members are robbed of their individuality and identity, while their physical and psychical liberties are gradually restrained up to the point when the messiah comes to have the right of life and death upon them. People caught in such phenomena cannot rationally motivate their status. They do not realize or they do not want to admit what is happening to them. Driven by fear, by shame or even by a kind of crushing certainty that eliminates doubt, people get to act in ways they never thought they would. They accept to be abused because they invested huge amounts of time and money in the cult, separated themselves from society and they have nowhere else to go. As the hierarchical relationship strengthens, the outside world is more and more portrayed as toxic, poisonous, murderous, with the leader and the cult as the only saving solutions. All the good that happens to them is because of the cult, and everything that is not good is due to their fault or the outside society.

Sectarians sometimes discard their current names and adopt new, pompous names, in an attempt to embellish or to hide their true insignificant identity. This process signals the spiritual rebirth and the denial of the shameful past. Jones directly entitled himself the “Messiah” or “Jesus Christ.” Shoko Asahara was initially named “Chizuo Matsumoto,” and within the cult he declared himself to be Christ and the Lamb of God. [1058] Wayne Bent changed his name to “Michael Travesser.” After he had been affected by the Jerusalem syndrome, David Koresh returned to Waco more determined than

ever to establish the Millennial Kingdom [1059] and one of his first things he did was to signal that he was a new man. In 1990 Vernon Howell legally changed his name to “David Koresh.” The first name was taken from King David, while “Koresh” is a transliteration of the name of the biblical Persian king Cyrus (which in modern Romanized Persian language is written *Kurosh*). [1060]

There are many reasons why people throw themselves into this nonsense and, surprisingly, they have little or nothing to do with God and everything to do with the individual life experience. The obsession for religion or for the end of the world may be a reflection of the sense of uncertainty toward life, of the sense of hate toward society or of the sick fascination with superpowers and elitism. Cults exert a special attraction upon those who experience an emotional cocktail of depressions, frustrations, confusion regarding the meaning of life, loneliness, lack of a sexual life, unhappiness with regard to their work or achievements, want of a new ideal or passing through an identity crisis. By adhering to obscure groups the individual seeks acceptance or tries to fill his intellectual void and to confer a grandiose purpose to his meaningless life. He wants to be special, to have something that is rare and valuable. The idea of a global end confers a higher meaning to the individual life because the miraculous finality of history is preferable to an ordinary and personal death. The illusion of grandiosity attracts in this odyssey individuals from all social blankets, no matter the social status or wealth. The perfect follower is uneducated, frustrated, timorous, overrun by guilt, overzealous, well-intentioned and he never asks questions. He desperately seeks a guide to free him of the burden of the unknown. Accordingly, as long as reason is eclipsed by faith, aberrant religious movements will never lack human material. There will always be people ready to use religion in exploitative purposes and people who are ready to deliver the responsibility of their redemption in the hands of anyone who promises peace of mind.

5. THE CONSPIRATORIAL APOCALYPSE

The conspiratorial apocalypse is a part of the larger phenomenon of conspiracy theory. The expression “conspiracy theory” is frequently used in popular culture to describe secret military, economic or political actions

meant to steal power, money or the freedom of the majority. Conspiracy theories are based on the notion that major events are the products of plans unknown to the general public, emanated by an elite which, depending on fears and the level of understanding, is identified with Freemasonry, the Illuminati, New Age occultists, aliens or other imaginary or real groups.

While the expression “conspiracy theory” is a modern creation, the idea of conspiracy exists ever since the world has the image of the invisible supernatural battle between good and evil. Conspiracy is seen as a perfidious method through which evil is trying to undermine good. Conspiracy theory is used to blame someone or something when there is a feeling of a crisis, when people see false patterns in their social environment or they are incapable to rationally explain certain social phenomena.

Each historical context has its conspirators. In the first centuries the Romans saw the secret practice of Christianity as a conspiracy meant to destroy the empire. In the Middle Ages the devil constantly conspired to corrupt Christians or it cooperated with the Jews to undermine the religion of Christ. [1061] During the Reformation, when the Papacy was demonized, Protestants portrayed a conspiring Antichrist, who rises from within society through subversive means. On the other hand, Catholics saw the Reformation as a great devilish conspiracy meant to destroy the institution of God. The Puritans feared popish conspiracies. The Salem witch trials is one the first examples of conspiracy theories in the history of America. After the American Revolution there were fears of British conspiracies or satanic conspiracies. Theologians such as Darby claimed that elite groups sold their soul to Satan to gain power and money, and became pawns in a supernatural game of chess. Through these agents mankind was pushed to accept a global government, based on the spiritual foundations of a false religion in which the Unholy Trinity – the Antichrist, Satan and the False Prophet – would be adored. [1062] During the Cold War the Americans saw Soviet conspiracies. Aliens have conspired ever since they came to public attention, while other current Christian theories state that the False Prophet will be a pope or a New Age guru, and the Antichrist will be the president of the world or a Muslim caliph.

Conspiracy theories have mainly targeted mystical and secretive groups of

the Enlightenment. The most debated anti-Christian conspiratorial movement of all time is Freemasonry. There is no telling when Freemasonry was actually founded. According to legend, it was established at the time of Solomon by the masons of the Temple. By contrast, historical sources indicate the moment of its appearance sometime between the 14th and the 16th century in the British Isles. In any case, throughout history Freemasonry has been accused countless times that it has a secret political agenda and conspires to institute a single global leadership by seizing important political and financial positions. At the time of the French Revolution the esoteric nature of Masonic symbolism became the target of the accusation of the Scot John Robison. His work about Freemasonry – which aims to undermine religion and to take the control of the world – crossed the Atlantic and influenced the patriotic and religious discourse of the great awakenings. [1063] Later, in the 1890s, the French journalist Leo Taxil wrote a series of pamphlets and books in which he accused Masonic lodges of worshiping Lucifer. Despite the fact that Taxil admitted afterward that the accusations had been invented, they were already believed and spread. [1064]

The Order of the Illuminati is another well-known conspiratorial subject. This was a secret society founded by the philosopher Adam Weishaupt in 1776 in Upper Bavaria, Germany. The organization was made up of defenders of Enlightenment ideals: rationalism, freedom of thought, liberalism, republicanism and gender equality. All the Illuminati were in fact Freemasons recruited from German lodges and this is why later conspiratorial accounts about the Illuminati and Freemasons have been intertwined. In 1785 the order was exposed and destroyed by the governmental agents of Charles Theodore, Elector of Bavaria. Theodore feared that the order might have become powerful enough to overthrow the monarchy and the state religion of Catholicism. [1065]

There is no solid evidence that the Illuminati survived Theodore’s actions. Yet, toward the end of the 18th century the doctor Scott Robinson and the French Jesuit Augustin Barruel, influenced by the writings of John Robison, speculated that the Illuminati managed to escape the oppression, came to be the leaders of Freemasonry and from behind the scenes they orchestrated the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. The Illuminati were accused of attempting through subversive methods to generate a wave of revolutions all

over the world in order to impose atheism, the cult of reason and the creation of an aristocracy of the Illuminati (noocracy). [1066]

Today, adherents of conspiracy theory try to prove the subversive actions of Freemasons and the Illuminati by revealing certain patterns, symbols or hidden codes characteristic to these organizations: the all-seeing eye, the pyramid, the obelisk, the compass or the pentagram. There are speculations that the founders of the United States, such as George Washington or Benjamin Franklin, introduced patterns of sacred Masonic geometry in American symbols – the Great Seal of the United States, the design of the American dollar or the Washington Monument – as part of a more comprehensive plan. The American Freemasons, together with the Illuminati or any other obscure organization, have been frequently depicted by their compatriots as the instruments of Satan. They have been blamed for using occult powers to implement the plan of the Masonic god: the establishment of the New World Order and the building of the Third Temple from within which the Masonic Messiah, the Antichrist, will preside. [1067]

The problem of conspiracy theory is that it often relies on fake evidence, pure speculations and especially old ultra-familiar patterns such as blaming the Jews. For example, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a false anti-Semitic pamphlet published in 1903 Russia that describes a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy willing to dominate the world. The text was designed as an outline of the plans conceived by the Jewish conspirators who took control of Freemasonry and aim to rule the world in the name of the Jewish people as the chosen people of God. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* enumerates conspiratorial themes emphasized by Robinson and Barruel, speaking, among other things, about plans to subvert the morals of the non-Jewish world, plans of the Jewish bankers to control global economy, plans for a Jewish control of the media and ultimately plans for the destruction of civilization. The subtle message of the work was that, once the Freemasonic and Illuminati barriers are removed, the Jewish rotten core is going to be revealed. [1068]

Later, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* proved to be a forgery, in some parts being copied almost word for word from *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiave et Montesquieu* , a 19th-century satire against Napoleon III. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was most likely created by the political activist Matvei

Golovinski in order to be used by Okhrana, the secret police of the Russian Empire, as a counter-revolutionary propagandistic paper before the Revolution of 1905. Yet, the pamphlet was treated as an authoritative source of inspiration and fueled the anti-Semitic and anti-Masonic hysterias of the 20th century. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* has been frequently used to prove the existence and the activity of the Priory of Sion, an alleged powerful Jewish secret society. Both the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the Priory of Sion have been depicted as a fulfillment of the apocalyptic prophecies and a solid evidence of the Jewish conspiracy that prepares the coming of their Messiah, the Christian Antichrist. [1069]

In the conspiratorial apocalypse of the 20th and 21st centuries the expression "New World Order" holds a special place. The main theme of the current debates about the New World Order is that a powerful secret elite conspires to establish a totalitarian world government. By using as cover public organizations, it orchestrates political and economic events meant to gradually concentrate the entire decisional power in the hands of a few acolytes of the Antichrist. But no one can say exactly how this totalitarian system would be established and what it would look like. The form of the speculations and theories regarding these aspects are limited only by the boundaries of imagination.

The truth is that the new world order, as a concept, is very old and it has had multiple meanings over the millennia. It is a historical fact that social and political orders have succeeded one after another depending on the movement of the masses or other major events. For example, the collapse of the Roman Empire, the French Revolution, the collapse of the monarchical system or the two world wars – each marked the termination of an order and the beginning of another. On the other hand, people have always aimed to change the current world or order with a new world or order, according to their own ideals. The Romans aimed to impose a Roman world order; the medieval Christians wished a new world order in which everyone was converted to Christianity; Napoleon attempted to establish a new world order with himself as absolute ruler; Stalin imagined a new world order in which everyone was communist; and today the United States promotes the idea of a new world order in which everyone adopts capitalism and consumerism.

After the two world wars the expression “New World Order” was used by various personalities to emphasize the dramatic geopolitical changes. The atrocities of the First World War led to the foundation of the League of Nations – an unprecedented political organism which had the purpose to assure a dialog between the powers of the world and ultimately to prevent another world war. This context made H. G. Wells expressly militate for a new world order and a unique global state as a solution to the eternal problems of mankind: poverty, warfare, nationalism, inequality or disease. In *The Open Conspiracy* (1928) and *The New World Order* (1940) Wells argued that the unique state and a new world order are historical inevitabilities. However, in order to become a utopia and not a dystopia, they must be governed by scientific elites and not by politicians.

Then, the stinging lesson of the Second World War demanded the creation of a new framework for international dialogue, new principles of global governance and a collective effort to solve problems beyond the power of sovereign states, but without affecting the right of nations to self-determination. These needs led to the creation of the United Nations (UN), an organism that aims to maintain an international dialogue.

In 1940 the British occultist Alice Bailey, one of the founders of the New Age movement, prophesied the victory of the Allies and the establishment of a new political and religious world order. She saw a federal world government guided by Masters of the Ancient Wisdom preparing mankind for the return of Christ and the establishment of the Age of Aquarius. According to Bailey, a group of spiritual masters situated in parallel dimensions guide humanity toward a new world order by telepathically communicating with spiritually superior human beings. The writings of Bailey, of Helena Blavatsky and of other subsequent New Age adherents fueled the imagination of Christian circles. Hence, the New Age movement has been often portrayed as a devilish religion that aims to replace Christianity in the New World Order. [1070]

Ever since their appearance, aliens have been included in the large mass of conspiracies. The predominant theme is that aliens have been among us for centuries or even millennia, but they have been communicating only with certain governments. The conspiratorial aliens seem to be a caricature of the

human instincts: motivated by imperialism and the desire to control and subdue, they secretly manipulate the changes of our society to have more control over people and to exploit them more efficiently. Some theories say that alien infiltrators took human shape and move freely within human society, acquiring important positions within political, financial and religious institutions. And now, with the help of mass surveillance technologies, they are in the final stage of taking control of the entire world. [1071]

During the Cold War communism was a prevalent theme of the American conspiratorial discourses. The communist threat encouraged isolationism on the ground that international cooperation means the start of a gradual process of collectivism and subsequently the replacement of nations with a global communist government. The John Birch Society was the source of many conspiracy theories in the 1960s. One of these theories said that the governments of the United States, of the Soviet Union and of the United Nations were controlled by a secret organization composed of greedy bankers and corrupt politicians with the intent to create a global leadership. After the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 conspiracy theories violently turned against the American elites and institutions. These have been accused of being manipulated from the shadows by Jewish bankers, Freemasons, the Illuminati and Zionist organizations. [1072]

Some conspiracy theories state that the New World Order is gradually installed, so that the common man does not notice the changes or he gets used little by little, up to the point when the curtailment of freedom, the creation of a world government or the abandonment of religion seem natural. This point of view is supported by the progressive creation of international institutions such as the League of Nations in 1919, the International Monetary Fund in 1944, the United Nations in 1945, the World Bank in 1945, the European Union in 1993, the Euro currency in 2000 or the African Union in 2002. [1073]

Other conspiracy theories say that the New World Order and the world government will be established through a series of strikes or one single strike against the current order, followed by the imposition of martial law. The supporters of this scenario point to Pearl Harbor, the assassination of John F. Kennedy or September 11, 2001 – events that changed the defense system of the United States and led to the adoption of controversial legislation such as

the *USA Patriot Act* . Before the year 2000 it was speculated that there would be a global strike at the transition between 1999 and 2000 through the Y2K bug. This was supposed to cause a fatal error in the computers of the world, followed by the crash of financial markets, revolts, and ultimately the collapse of society, leaving room for the establishment of the New World Order.

Regardless the way the New World Order will be instituted, everyone agrees that the shadow government uses advanced technologies to oversee and control the masses. Yet, it is no secret that new technologies are often met with skepticism or cause alarmist reactions. In the 15th century Gutenberg's printing press was condemned by the Catholic clergy because it made the holy texts available to laymen, which could further give birth to heresies. Then, utopian communities such as the Amish rejected the technological innovations and decided to remain to the level of candle and cart. In the 20th and 21st century video cameras, barcodes, microchip implants and other similar technologies have caused panic, doubt, alarms and have fueled millenarism and a sense of paranoia. [1074]

Conspiracy theorists believe that one of the primary objectives of the conspirators is to stabilize or to decrease the population of the world. A totalitarian New World Order requires a strict regulation of the number of future slaves. This involves stopping the growth of human societies through abstinence, abortions and birth control or reducing the number of people through wars, genocides, diseases or man-made disasters. Conspiracy theorists incriminate governments, corporations and the media for imposing on masses so-called "general opinions" through information filtering, the use of reverse psychology and general disinformation. The greatest fear is related to the possibility of mind control and to impose certain thoughts, behaviors, feelings or conceptions into people's minds without their consent. These scenarios rely on theories such as the "Manchurian candidate," parapsychological operations or brainwashing through subliminal messages introduced in movies, video games or music. [1075]

From another point of view, the expression "conspiracy theory" is sometimes ironically used by skeptics for criticizing ridiculous, irrational, groundless or paranoid claims. The first thing that stands out to conspiracy theories is the

doctrinal chaos: aliens conspire with the world's governments to the detriment of the masses, the devil conspires with the world's governments to install the Antichrist, occultists conspire to establish a new religion, secret societies conspire to the detriment of governments and masses, the Jews conspire to the detriment of secret societies, governments and the masses, and so on indefinitely. Everyone conspires. Paranoid leaders such as Jim Jones and Shoko Asahara tend to see conspiracies everywhere and to infuse their vision in their followers. And when the paranoia of a single man becomes a well-outlined mass phenomenon, with well-defined enemies, the effects can be devastating.

There are multiple answers to the question why conspiracy theory is so appealing to the public. According to Michael Barkun, the attraction exerted by conspiracism has three roots. First, conspiracy theories explain some aspects that cannot be explained by authorized institutions; conspiracies seem to make order in a confused world, as magic explains phenomena not yet scientifically explained. Second, conspiracy theory mythicizes the real world by splitting it into two simple and clearly defined sides: the forces of darkness and the forces of light. This image of the world puts the negative and undesirable events on the account of a single source, the conspirators and their agents. Third, the conspirators are demonized and believed to possess supernatural powers and special knowledge. In this context the brainwashed masses of people are like herds of animals, while conspiracy theorists congratulate themselves for managing to break the informational barrier built by conspirators. [1076] Conspiracy theories make people feel special; they feed their personal delirium. Most people do not become what they have wanted to become in their personal activity. They do not identify with their meaningless job, with their trivial life or with their dysfunctional family. Because if they do, then they have a weak identity. So they take refuge in universes that satisfy their need to feel important: sectarianism, mysticism, exotic hobbies or conspiracy theories.

It is our nature to mystify what we do not know or know very little. Conspiracy theories come into being when people fill their gaps of knowledge with own anxieties and fears. By experiencing a sense of helplessness and insignificance in front of the world's course, the individual feels that he lost the control in favor of an exterior force. And when people

believe that they can no longer exercise their independence as they initially conceived it or that they cannot materialize their aspirations, they experiment a crisis and they conclude that stronger and maleficent exterior forces are guilty of usurping their freedom. Splitting the world in two and placing himself on the good side help the speaker combine his personal mythology with the real world. There are several patterns that signal a paranoid conspiratorial behavior: the belief that important historical events are necessarily sinister, a vision of the world that removes the historical inertia and confers conspiracies a greater historical force compared to the force of the masses, and an uncontrolled absorption of fears from multiple sources.

To make things even more complicated, the paranoid insinuation that there is a conspiracy does not mean that that conspiracy is not real; [1077] on the contrary, there have been cases when refuted conspiracy theories later turned out to be true. [1078] In addition, toward the end of the 20th century conspiracy theory became a profitable entertainment product. Fear sells. The problem is that Hollywood, through its dramatic and commercial style of depicting conspiracies, ridicules the idea of conspiracy up to the point people reject it entirely. So, when it comes to conspiracies, there is a thin line between paranoia, entertainment and reality. And the three aspects do not even exclude each other: paranoia regarding a conspiracy does not mean that there is no conspiracy, just like a real conspiracy can be an inspiring source for entertainment industry.

Conspiracy theory must be neither exaggerated nor ignored. From an evolutionary point of view, conspiracies are more likely to exist than not. The social side of human nature, combined with greed and selfishness, will always drive people to forge shady associations in order to gain advantages to the detriment of other people. This aspect certainly creates powerful financial and political phenomena that most of the time are unknown to common people. In addition, the huge number of independent documentaries, information and proofs brought to support the existence of conspiracies, the suspicious and insisting presence of the symbol of the all-seeing eye in unusual contexts such as the videos of famous artists, and the vagueness of the official versions of the September 11, 2001, attacks [1079] – all raise serious questions and make conspiracy theory not look that paranoid anymore.

The Antichrist is a myth. That is for sure. But the world is still predominantly religious, composed of people who continue to believe tales about legendary battles between good and evil. If this myth snowballed too hard over the millennia, then it is possible – but highly improbable – that today there is shady organizations which work to fulfil the prophecies. In the conspiratorial universe, besides the Illuminati and Freemasons, there are also relatively new and less-known groups such as the Bilderberg Group, the Council of Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission or Skull and Bones. No one knows the agenda of these groups, if they conspire or not or if there is a relation between them. And this is exactly the eternal problem of conspiracy theory: it cannot make the difference between the real conspiracies and the conspiratorial jokes that got out of control. The word “manipulation” became a sort of general explanation, a tool for mutual accusations and even a means of irony. All evidence regarding conspiracies are circumstantial and no one can tell if the conspiratorial groups defend the personal interests of their members, the interests of a group, the interests of a country, support a certain ideology or they have a much sinister purpose, such as the establishment of the New World Order.

6. THE YEAR 2000 AND THE FASCINATION OF NUMBERS

In the age of microchips and satellites apocalypticism follows the same millenary principle: it molds according to our fears, frustrations or insecurities. Prophecies are constantly interpreted according to the context and knowledge from a given moment. Some scenarios disappeared from the collective consciousness, but others more modern took their place. In the last century the Bible or the Nostradamic quatrains have no longer depicted floods or volcanic eruptions, but atomic bombs, the Third World War, ozone depletion, pole shift, geomagnetic reversal or even alien invasions. The 20th century contains more recorded apocalyptic manifestations than any other preceding century, and a good part of them were clustered in the years 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000. The last year of the second millennium was an apocalyptic reference point, just as the years 1000, 1666 and 2012.

The first who assigned a prophetic significance to the year 2000 was James

Ussher in the 17th century based on the millennial week theory. In the 19th century Helena Blavatsky, the founder of theosophy, speculated the end of the world in the year 2000 on mystical bases. [1080] And during the Cold War people feared that the year 2000 might bring the nuclear holocaust. But in 1991 the Soviet Union disintegrated, the United States remained the only superpower in the world and the Gulf War began. The new context triggered new speculations: Mikhail Gorbachev was the Antichrist, [1081] Saddam Hussein was the Antichrist who gathers all Arab nations against Israel, America was the apocalyptic beast, or an asteroid collided with Earth as in the movies *Deep Impact* (1998) and *Armageddon* (1998). The televangelist Jack Van Impe, dubbed the "Walking Bible," produced the documentary *A.D. 2000... The End?* in which he spoke about a Third World War, the invasion of Israel by Russia and the religious and political globalization. The members of a Vietnamese sect took the threat of the year 2000 too seriously and in 1993 they committed mass suicide to avoid the seven years of the great tribulation. [1082] And numerology enthusiasts noticed that 1,998 divided by 3 is 666. The number 1,999 can be seen as 666 reversed, while 2,000 divided by 3 is 666.66666666666667. Later, in 2006, there was a concern about the date of June 6, 2006, which could be written as 06.06.06.

The end of the millennium was a competition that attracted an entire range of prophets and prophecies. In terms of failed prophecies, Charles Taylor rivaled with Jehovah's Witnesses. From 1975 until 2001 Taylor prophesied the end of the world 15 times, every time on the occasion of the Jewish New Year holiday. [1083] Marilyn J. Agee most likely set a record in the field: by using almost everything human imagination can conceive in terms of apocalypse – conspiracies, total wars, killer asteroids, numerological calculations, the most bizarre and unfortunate connections of events – between 1998 and 2007 Agee prophesied the end of the world 16 times. [1084]

Naturally, Nostradamus could not be absent from the picture, especially because quatrain X.72 makes reference to the year 1999, to a "king of terror," to a "king of Mongols" and to "Mars." And even though 1999 passed uneventfully, the quatrain has continued to be reinterpreted again and again. [1085]

Edgar Cayce, a self-entitled American prophetic guru of the 20th century, was a cheap copy of Nostradamus. Based on alleged visions, Cayce made

numerous obscure, addle and meaningless prophecies, just like the master Nostradamus. And, exactly as in the case of the French mystic, some people wasted their time trying to find a meaning to Cayce's prophecies. Kirk Nelson used Cayce's prophecies, Nostradamus's prophecies, the prophecies of the Hopi Indians, Revelation and the Dead Sea Scrolls to conclude that the Second Coming would occur in 1998. [1086] In 2001 Cayce was also the source of inspiration for the geomagnetic reversal scenario. [1087] By contrast, no prophet spoke about the Internet, which proved to be one of the most brilliant inventions of the century.

Actually, the last years of the second millennium were not about the end of the world, but about money. The fear of the year 2000 had no eschatological basis, but pseudo-exegetes such as Hal Lindsey [1088] , Ed Dobson [1089] or Lester Sumrall [1090] struggled to prove otherwise with their intellectual products. Occasionally, this type of authors tried to be more appealing by bringing arguments about the presence of certain codes and encrypted prophecies in the holy books. Rashad Khalifa used the computer to prove numerical and textual patterns in the Quran. [1091] Hal Lindsey claimed that he cracked the code of the Book of Revelation. [1092] Michael Drosnin published not one, but three books about biblical codes. He, allegedly, found hidden messages in the Torah about the Third World War in 2000 or 2006, that Libya was going to produce weapons of mass destruction or that the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was going to be murdered by the Hamas organization (he died of natural causes in 2004). [1093] And last but not least, Michael Rathford spoke about a code of Nostradamus. [1094] All prophecies based on the deciphering of codes failed miserably.

Leaving aside the mystic circus, the year 2000 truly had a destructive potential, but not due to divine wrath, but because of technology. The most serious and widespread scarecrow of the year 2000 was Y2K or the "Millennium Bug." In essence, Y2K was defined as the inability of computers to make a valid transition from the year 1999 to the year 2000. In mathematics, the number 1,000 is sometimes represented by the letter "K" (for example 3,000 = 3K, 5,000 = 5K) from the prefix "kilo," which is derived from the (Romanized) Greek word *chilioi* ("thousand"). So, the name "Y2K" is an abbreviation of the English expression "Year 2000."

The Millennium Bug was not a religious or mystical invention, but a fact. In the 1970s, when the computer industry was at the beginning, virtual memory was very expensive. So, different solutions had to be used in order to save virtual space. One of these was to mark the years only with the last two digits of the total of four. For example, 72 was used instead of 1972, or 84 was used instead of 1984. The computer determined the year only according to the last two digits, adding 19 automatically as a standard prefix. The problem was that the last two digits of the years 2000 and 1900 are identical: 00 and 00. Hence, on January 1, 2000, at 00:00, some computers could interpret the time as being the year 1900, others as 2000, and others to crash. Computer errors can cause important losses for individuals and companies, fatal accidents, interrupted communications or panic.

The Millennium Bug represented a danger, but it was far from the image promoted by the speculators eager to sell their apocalyptic products. In 1998 Julian Gregori said that Y2K would cause the collapse of civilization, a good thing, in his opinion, given the moral degradation of mankind. [1095] Shaunti Feldhahn offered survival tips such as gathering supplies, arming or withdrawing money from accounts and keeping them in the house. [1096] Karen Anderson launched a guide for women who wanted to know how to protect their family during the collapse without sacrificing their femininity. [1097] Gary North declared on his virtual domain that "the domino effect will create ever-increasing institutional noise and confusion throughout January and beyond." [1098] Or Bob and Joan Rutz from Kingston, both retired, built the Prayer Lake community, in Northwest Arkansas, hoping that after the disaster around 100 families would gather there to live a simple life of gardening, with kerosene lamps and water from springs and water wells. [1099]

Y2K was a blessing for conspiracy theorists, who saw it as the weapon meant to destroy the civilization in order to make room for the New World Order. [1100] A famous modern legend which said that in Brussels there was a supercomputer called the "Beast." This was the brain of the operations of the evil empire of the European Union and it had the purpose to keep track of every single man and financial operation in the world. [1101] The Y2K phenomenon became a combination between the science fiction franchise *Terminator* and the Christian apocalypse. And numerology came to strengthen this idea. Calculated through one of Michael Stifel's methods (A =

6, B = 12, C = 18, D= 24 and so on), the word COMPUTER = 666. Due to these aspects, in 1998 Ted Hall and C. L. Smith blamed the computers for being materializations of evil and, naturally, offered for sale a survival guide. [1102]

Most computers had been replaced or updated before January 1, 2000. Problems occurred indeed, but only a few were major: in Great Britain some cash machines rejected credit cards; in Toronto, Canada, the central system of administration of hospitals crashed, but it was quickly replaced while an auxiliary system was used; minor problems occurred at seven nuclear power plants in the United States; or a weather map at a television in France indicated the year 19100. [1103]

Another real threat around the year 2000 came from people. After the bloody events caused by the Davidians and Aum, American authorities feared that religious fanatics might try to cause the end of the world through anti-social actions. In 1999 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) launched *Project Megiddo* in order to identify and watch potentially dangerous cults. [1104] The originator of the project, the director Louis Freeh, warned that apocalyptic groups might prepare for the anticipated Armageddon or they might want to generate shocking social effects through robberies, actions of terrorism or mass suicides. [1105]

At first glance, the source of the apocalyptic fascination with the years 1000 and 2000 seem to be the obscure texts of Revelation 20, where the expression “a thousand years” (or “thousands of years” according to other Bible versions) is used six times. Revelation 20 is the foundation of the entire millennial doctrine, but the text does not refer expressly to the years 1000 or 2000; this is why the “thousand years” was interpreted over time either symbolically or literally, as a specific and practical calendrical unit. In reality, the explanation behind this fascination is not of religious nature, but psychological.

The number 1,000 seems mystical, powerful and especially complete because it is a round number. The modern man thinks in the decimal (base 10) system of numeration; he imagines, conceives and organizes his environment though this system of numeration. Money is the best example of the way we apply numbers in the material world: we have money of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 1,000 or

2,000 units. Nowhere in the world is there money of 3,245 units, of 1,415 units or any other numerical values that are difficult to operate with.

Most ancient systems of numeration were built on the value of 1, 5 and 10. The Latin system was based on six symbols with dual significance, used to form both words and numbers: I = 1, V = 5, X =10, L = 50, C = 100, D = 500, M = 1,000. The Egyptian numbers were based on the value of 10: 1, 10, 100, 1,000 and so on. The current system of numeration, from zero to nine and base ten, is the combination between the Hindu and the Arab systems. The presence of ten proves that all systems of numeration have in common a biological root. Thousands of years ago the ability to count and to calculate was rare, and those who possessed it used as computing tools the most accessible things: fingers. [1106]

The connection between fingers and numbers entails psychological consequences. Given the fact that fingers are ten in number, it is very easy to see this aspect as a "whole." In other words, the number ten is a round number and becomes a round, a sphere or a perfect quantity. What is beyond the number ten is an addition. Up to ten we can count on fingers. For numerical values above ten the counting process must start over, as a revolution. Thus, if ten is imagined as a whole, then the number 15 is like a whole plus a half-whole, the number 20 as two wholes, 50 as five wholes or 80 as eight wholes. But, when it comes to the numbers 100, 1,000, 10,000 and so on, these are seen as a copy of the perfect number ten, all wholes formed from adding other wholes. If people had, for example, eight fingers, the system of numeration would be octal (base 8: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, ... 18, 20, 21, ...), or if we had 16 fingers, the system of numeration would be hexadecimal (base 16). The Babylonians imagined time as being cyclic or circular, and they had a siximal (base 6) system of numeration. This is why today we have 12 (from 12 astrological signs in the zodiac) or 24 hours in a day, 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, or the year initially had 360 days (according to the 360 degrees of a circle). [1107]

When numbers are applied to time, time becomes divided and organized according to the adopted system of numeration, together with all the psychological and cultural significances of that system. In this case, 10, 100 or 1,000 years become temporal wholes. Thus, the fascination with round

years is only a product of the cultural representation of time, and not a consequence of a divine revelation. While we perceive certain numbers as beautiful, proportionate, harmonious or interesting, their status has nothing to do with a divine order and they have everything to do with the human order.

Throughout history apocalyptic exegetes attempted to find the date of the end of the world by using elaborate calendars and making complex calculations. The problem with all these endeavors is that the recording and the quantification of time are based on human conventions that evolved depending on period and place. For example, 25th of December is not the actual date of the birth of Jesus, but a date chosen to mark the birth of Jesus. [1108] Likewise, Easter does not have a stable calendrical date, it is set every year according to the lunar calendar, and it is celebrated differently by Catholic and Orthodox churches. Or the beginning and the end of a current year (1st of January – 31st of December) is a Roman legacy that has nothing to do with Abrahamic religions, [1109] while its structure formed of months, weeks and days is a combination between Roman and Hebrew practices. [1110]

Ultimately, the strongest argument against any apocalyptic calculations is the uneven flowing of time. The present days have a different length in comparison to the days 2,000 ago. Over periods of thousands of years the temporal differences between the Gregorian calendar and the astronomical calendar occur due to tides and the slowing of Earth's rotation around its axis. These aspects make every day longer than the preceding one with a couple of hundredths of a second. The movement of rotation can also be influenced by earthquakes or the impact of our planet with huge celestial bodies. In case there are no other influences, only the natural slowing of Earth's rotation and the influence of the tides will create a temporal gap between the current calendar and the astronomical one of at least 0.8 and at most 1.1 days in the year 4000, and of at least eight and at most 12 days in the year 12000. [1111]

In conclusion, prophetic calculations based on measuring time are arbitrary, disastrous and purely human. A calendar is a method through which man, and not the divine, attempts to make order in the temporal chaos by establishing patterns and connections. Nature has nothing to do with the human calendars. Our attempt to assign supernatural significances to certain days or years is

destined to fail. Indeed, the human mind can see in the flowing of time symmetries and meanings dictated by its cultural baggage. But the Universe does not care about the importance or the significance humans assign to temporal points.

7. THE REVIVAL OF MYSTICISM

7.1. THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

Of all the apocalyptic prophecies based on astrology, only one survived until our days: the entering in the Age of Aquarius. This is present in many fatalistic and religious theories, archaeological and historical mysteries, new-discovered calendars, exotic non-Christian beliefs or spiritual revivals.

The Age of Aquarius is one of the 12 astrological ages. Unlike the zodiacal signs, which start with Aries, followed by Taurus, and end with Aquarius and Pisces, astrological ages succeed each other in the opposite order: the Age of Aquarius is preceded by the Age of Pisces, the current eon, and it will be followed by the Age of Capricorn.

Astrological ages exist due to the precession of equinoxes. Stars and constellations slowly spin around Earth independently of its movements of rotation (around its axis) and revolution (around the Sun). This incredible slow movement completes a cycle in approximately 26,000 years, which means that every astrological age has approximately 2,150 years. The astrological age of a certain moment is given by the position of the Sun in a zodiacal constellation in the northern hemisphere during the spring (vernal) equinox. But, due to the fact that the 12 zodiacal constellations are not equal in size and have vague temporal boundaries, astrologers cannot unanimously decide if mankind entered or not in the Age of Aquarius, how long it will last or how it will influence mankind. [1112]

Astrologically speaking, it is believed that the ages influence the evolution of mankind. For example, the Age of Pisces was ruled by sword and marked by conflicts, while the Age of Aquarius is expected to bring mankind discovery and knowledge. Because the fish – from the Age of Pisces – has been a symbol for Jesus and of the period between the First and the Second Coming,

the Age of Aquarius is frequently identified with the Christian Millennium. [1113] The emergence and the development of some of the features of the sign of Aquarius in the last centuries are considered to be indicators of the presence of the Age of Aquarius: calculations, flight, democracy, freedom, idealism or technological progress.

David Williams states that the transition to the Age of Aquarius occurred in 1844, through the advent of Siyyid Ali Muhammad, the founder of the Baha'i religion. According to Williams, every age is divided into three seasons or decans. The three decans of the Age of Aquarius are, in chronological order, Libra, Gemini and Aquarius. Currently, the world is in the decan of Libra of the Age of Aquarius, which causes wars (due to Libra) and revolutions (due to Aquarius). Although mankind made a huge progress since 1844, the world will achieve true knowledge only in the decan of Aquarius. This will start in the year 3284 and it will last until 4004. [1114]

According to the American preacher Levi Dowling, the Age of Aquarius will be the age of discoveries and material and spiritual progress. Aquarius is a sign of air, and mankind made remarkable inventions in the last centuries by using air, electricity and magnetism. [1115]

Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi, a self-proclaimed reincarnation of important deities, stated that the Age of Aquarius started in 2012, when the world began to evolve toward a new level of spiritual consciousness. Its installation marked the radiant beginning of a period of unification, peace, knowledge, ideological purification and the fulfillment of all mankind's aspirations. [1116]

Marcia Moore and Mark Douglas optimistically say that the establishment of the Age of Aquarius is unknown, but important events such as the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution or the discovery of electricity are signs of its presence. Under the sign of Aquarius people will become more impersonal (detached), altruistic and humane. Likewise, Ingrid Lind says that the Age of Aquarius is already installed due to the apparition of modern ideas and the chain of inventions. [1117] And Vera Reid sees the Age of Aquarius as the time within which humanity takes control of nature and of its own destiny, becoming the Bride of Christ. The keyword for the Age of Aquarius is "illumination" because humanity benefits from the revelation of truth and the expansion of knowledge. [1118]

The gloomy tone regarding the Age of Aquarius is adopted by the adherents of medieval astrology. Neil Spencer shows that the Age of Aquarius will not bring a utopia because it includes negative effects such as consumerism, nuclear power, media disinformation and all-powerful corporations. By combining Christian apocalyptic theories with New Age ones, Spencer associates the Age of Aquarius with the New World Order and the advent of the Antichrist. [1119] Robert Zoller's previsions are equally pessimistic: if in the Age of Pisces religion was the opium of the masses, in the Age of Aquarius secret elites will struggle to achieve absolute power. Families will be dissolved, science will be abused and knowledge will be used for military and imperialistic purposes. The Age of Aquarius will be a new Dark Age in which religion will be perceived as dangerous. [1120]

For Albert Amao the Age of Aquarius took the form of an argument in favor of American exceptionalism. The transition between the ages started in 1876 and it had to last until the conjunction between Saturn and Jupiter in the sign of Aquarius in 2020. The features of the Age of Aquarius are the elucidation of the religious mysteries through science, freedom and equality, the supremacy of the United States in comparison to the supremacy of Europe in the Age of Pisces, and ultimately the revealing of God. [1121]

Occasionally, depending on the context, the Age of Aquarius is associated with trends such as the salvation of Earth, living healthy and in harmony with nature, ecology and renewable energy. Ray Grasse suggests that, for integrating in this new age, man must replace the current decadent lifestyle, filled with industrial products, with organic goods, peace of mind, direct socialization and positive thinking. [1122]

7.2. THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

Even though it is a hundreds-year-old concept, the Age of Aquarius is currently closely connected with the hippie and the New Age tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s. The New Age movement is a sociocultural phenomenon that seeks universal truth by combining elements of spirituality, cosmology, esotericism, science and alternative medicine. It aims to create great spiritual and material changes and accordingly to be the harbinger and the initiator of the Age of Aquarius. In order to become a New Age adherent,

no formality, such as vows or confessing certain religious beliefs, is required. It is a very diverse and malleable system, which can be defined neither as a cult nor as a religion, although it is frequently described in this way. Nobody can speak in the name of the entire movement. Nevertheless, it incorporates a particular species of self-proclaimed prophets and visionaries who behave like the contactees, but they claim to be the modern successors of the biblical prophets.

Depending on the source, the beginning of New Age movement varies from Emanuel Swedenborg in the 18th century until the end of the Maya calendar on December 21, 2012. One of the important moments of the movement came to pass in 1875, at a time when spirituality was put under question by Darwinism and scientific progress. Henry Scott, William Judge and Helena Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society in New York. The beginning of New Age can also be associated with the years 1920-1930s, after the sequelae caused by the First World War, when the disciple in theosophy Alice Bailey proclaimed the return of Christ and the necessity to form groups of spiritualization. The pseudo-prophet Edgar Cayce is nominated at the origin of the movement as well, but he copied many of Blavatsky's ideas. [1123] So, the movement is not the product of a single man, but of a collective effort that shaped the pillars of spiritualism, transcendentalism and theosophy.

The first, spiritualism, refers to the communication with human spirits left from this world or with immaterial superior spirits (never incarnated on Earth) through a human medium. The purpose of spiritualism is to obtain information about other spheres of existence or about the past, present and future of our sphere of existence. The exchange of information between man and spirits takes places through channelling – which, as in the case of alien contacts, is a form of telepathy or the control of the body by other spirits (possession).

The second, transcendentalism, states that intuition is superior to the senses in discovering the truth, God can reveal himself to man through his intuition, and the purpose of religion is to bring conscious connection between mankind and divinity. Ralph Emerson was the chief exponent of 19th-century transcendentalism.

And finally, theosophy is a term which means "divine wisdom" and it was

coined by Helena Blavatsky. According to her, the spiritual evolution of mankind is guided by illuminated masters, persons who completed their earthly evolution through repeated incarnations. While the illuminated masters continue their own journey to reach a godlike state, they voluntarily help through revelations less illuminated human beings ascend to the same spiritual level. [1124]

Anthroposophy, Lucis Trust and the I AM movement are branches of theosophy. Anthroposophy was founded in 1912 by Rudolf Steiner. The term "anthroposophy" means "human wisdom" and its purpose is to remind people that they possess the entire truth and the entire universal wisdom in themselves. But the inner truth can be unveiled only by using special sciences, which enable man with spiritual perception, imperceptible to the material senses or modern devices. Steiner believed that the being of Christ is the central figure of all religions and faiths, manifested throughout history in the great spiritual leaders, and he has a sole message: love. When Christ will return people will acknowledge the spirit of love in all its forms. Parousia, however, will not be physical, but ethereal, visible only to those who will be spiritually prepared. [1125]

Lucis Trust was founded in 1923 by Alice and Foster Bailey. Alice Bailey was the voice of the Master of Wisdom, who telepathically dictated to her enough information to write 19 books. In January 1946 Bailey had a vision with Christ physically returning after the year 2025, at the start of the Age of Aquarius, the equivalent of the Millennium. Until that moment, the council of Christ, formed of spiritual masters such as the Count of Saint Germain, had the task to prepare the world for Parousia and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Christ would spend 2,158 years on Earth, according to the exact length of the Age of Aquarius. In August 1946 Bailey completed her prophecy and said that Christ might return by airplane and then he would be seen by the entire world on TV. [1126]

And, finally, the I AM movement was founded in the 1930s by Guy and Edna Ballard. The purpose of the revelations received by the two was to prepare mankind for the establishment of the Age of Aquarius and the global spreading of the "conscience of Christ." I AM states that there is a hierarchy of supernatural beings generically called "Ascended Masters" which includes

Jesus, Morya, Maitreya or Buddha. These had been theosophical masters who became immortal, left the circle of reincarnations and karma and achieved personal ascension. The Ascended Masters communicate with mankind through certain individuals, including Guy and Edna Ballard. [1127]

The New Age movement does not refer to organized communities, but rather to periodical gatherings of persons with the purpose of exchanging ideas or to meditate. Based on astrology and spirituality, where everything can be interpreted depending on the needs, the movement totally lacks precision and coherence. It is the modern form of mysticism; as in the 12th century the Catholic doctrines became insufficient and people searched for answers in other domains, at the moment New Age aims to bring light to issues unsolved by religions and science.

New Age strongly manifested in the 1960s among the hippies. After the assassination of John F. Kennedy, with the Cold War and the Vietnam War in full swing, conspiracy theories and racial segregation, American society was having powerful feelings of fear and insecurity. These aspects favored the rise of the hippie current on the West Coast of the United States, especially in the city of San Francisco. Under the slogan “make love, not war,” on January 14, 1967, around 10,000 people dressed in a pseudo-Hindu outfit gathered in Golden Gate Park demanding the change of America’s politics and lifestyle. The event was characterized as the inauguration of a new epoch, with the hippie current rapidly spreading from America to Western Europe. In reality, the movement was only a bunch of irresponsible youngsters willing to push the limits of fun. The euphoria was short-lived; although there were a quarter of a million American hippies, a couple of years later this counter-culture was struggling to survive. The reasons behind this rapid increase and decrease were the intensive consumption of drugs and alcohol, sexual depravity, and the crimes committed by the hippie group of Charles Manson. [1128]

After the powerful fluctuation of the 1960s, the New Age movement remained in a relative shadow until the year 2000. It was easy to connect the coming of the third millennium with the Age of Aquarius. But when nothing happened, the mystical speculations were quickly shifted toward December 21, 2012, and the end of the Maya calendar.

New Age states that every religion of the world contains a part of universal

truth. Thus, the religious syncretism of the movement has been built by violating cultures and religions from all over the world. It has taken teachings and principles and it has redefined them in a plausible and unifying frame. Anti-dogmatism, one of the virtues of the movement, allows the adherents to combine any religious doctrines with scientific theories in order to support the existence of aspects such as clairvoyance, telepathy, telekinesis, parallel universes, out-of-body experiences or quantum mysticism. The latter says that if you think too much of a thing, the Universe becomes influenced by your thought and it will evolve to make it physically real.

Although they treat the human being differently, ufology and New Age do not exclude each other; they often converge. Ufology humiliates the human being by stealing all his merits and assigning them to aliens: man is only an animal that cannot make anything extraordinary without the help of the brothers from space. New Age, on the contrary, says that man is a demigod, far above animals and nature. If “everything is one” and “everything is God,” then the entire Creation, including human beings, is ultimately an integral part of divinity. Every individual is called to build his own spiritual path by using a patrimony that comprises every mystical or religious tradition. Once people start to understand their own divinity, the purpose of life becomes the rediscovery of the inner greatness, love and wisdom. [1129] And in this quest man can be guided by superior spiritual entities.

New Age does not offer an exclusive devotion to a certain invisible and inaccessible supernatural force, to a certain teacher or to a certain doctrine because God reveals himself in countless ways. The Torah, the Bible or the Quran are not the only revelations of God, but only a part of the multitude of revelations. Personalities such as Jesus, Lao-Tze, Buddha, Hermes Trismegitus, Zarathustra, Moses or Muhammad have been only temporary manifestations of the Cosmic Messiah. Every time the latter incarnated he generated positive and spectacular changes. The last incarnation will happen in the future, when he will reveal himself to the entire world and he will initiate the Millennium and the Age of Aquarius.

Another important feature of the New Age movement is the necessity of personal and planetary transformation. The personal transformation, often described as illumination, harmonization or deification, refers to the

unification with God, with humanity and with the Universe. This is necessary because in the multimillenary evolutionary course people forgot their divine identity and surrendered to the illusion of limitation. Only through the transformation of conscience can man free himself of lie and can he rediscover his true potential. [1130] And when a critical mass of illuminated people will assume the social and political responsibility for the entire humanity, then the planetary transformation will occur.

In terms of morality, the principle “everything is one” annuls any distinction between good and bad. There are no moral absolutes. Everything is relative. The New Age morality is not based on the good-bad dualism. There will be no peace until humanity understands that there is no good or evil in truth. Good actually depends on the development of the human potential and the power of the mind. Hence, there is a particular interest in psychology and parapsychology among the New Age ranks. By practicing certain spiritual techniques and by propagating ideas such as “you are your own god” or “you create your own reality,” New Age theorists believe they empower the mind and enable people to control their destiny.

New Age assimilated the idea of reincarnation as well, seen as the process of continuous births up to the point the soul reaches a state of perfection and unites with the divine source. Karma refers to the dues accumulated by a soul according to the deeds committed during this life or past lives. A good karma leads to a reincarnation in a happier state, while a bad karma leads to a reincarnation in a less happy state. The world will be increasingly happier as more and more people possess a good karma.

Simply put, New Age is a grotesque transposition of the Christian concept of the Millennium through the revival of Gnosticism and neopaganism and an absurd vulgarization of Oriental beliefs. It is hard to believe that the hippies could have changed the world for the better through sexual depravity, alcohol, rhythms of The Beatles and pupils dilated by drugs. Add to these Manson’s crimes and the suicidal massacre from within the Order of the Solar Temple. Both Luc Joret and Di Mambro were obsessed with the establishment of new orders and occultism, while their act of suicide was a protest against the world that refused to evolve and to embrace New Age.

New Age promises to transform man into a demigod. Yet, ever since the

movement appeared, no one has proved that he has gained special powers or abilities. In fact, New Age celebrities have rather been associated with frauds, deceits, forgeries, extortion, paranoia and awful fallacies. For example, Edgar Cayce was obsessed with the relation between skin color and spirituality, and in his trances he stated that the great Pyramid was built in 10500 BC. [1131] Bu modern research show that the edifice was constructed around 2500 BC. Rudolf Steiner also speaks about spiritual superiority reflected in skin color, while Alice Bailey's early writings contain messages against the Jews. [1132] Ir *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), which served as the foundation for the birth of theosophy, Helena Blavatsky claimed that she had access to the *Book of Dzyan* – a thousands-year-old secret Tibetan text, written in the sacred language of *senzar* and preserved by the Occult Brotherhood. Later it was proved that Blavatsky invented the entire story and the texts were forged or plagiarized from Indian and European sources. [1133] From invisible continents, parallel dimensions, astral rapes and auras of energy to illuminated masters who hide in invisible dimensions like cockroaches from the public eye, New Age gathered under its umbrella pretty much everything an irrational mind could devise.

The New Age subculture is the ultimate form of spiritual kitsch. It is dominated by inept clichés such as everything which is secret, exotic, ancient and in small quantities is beneficial, while everything that is public, new and in large amounts is harmful. It often speaks about hidden, forgotten or ancient teachings, people more evolved than others or spiritual secrets that are situated in inaccessible places such as Tibet, Antarctic, Atlantis, other planets or parallel dimensions. These reflect the idea of ideological adventure, the tendency to ignore or to underrate the immediately accessible doctrines, and to search for overrated truths in remote and inaccessible places. In fact, such absurd claims have nothing to do with spiritual evolution and they have anything to do with feeding the ego and suppressing frustrations. Guy Ballard claimed that in past lives he had been Richard the Lionheart and George Washington, while Edna Ballard was the incarnation of Joan of Arc, Elizabeth I of England or Benjamin Franklin. The spiritual path is the cheapest and fastest method through which man can confer importance to his own ephemeral existence, even if that means pushing the boundaries of ineptitude. And there is also, naturally, the motivation of money. It is no secret that people are willing to spend serious money to escape reality. New

Age generates huge profits through festivals, paid sessions of spirituality and selling music, books or different trend-specific products.

Leaving aside the personal interests, New Age is a response to the segmentation of the religious phenomenon. Its purpose is to create a bridge between an increasingly narrowed spiritual world and an expanding technological material world. As Christianity reacted to the Enlightenment and to the separation of science from religion, in the same way the reorientation toward pseudosciences comes as a response to the stunning scientific development. Science demolishes the myth of man's divinity by comparing his nothingness with the mightiness of the Universe. By contrast, mysticism places man on a special seat at God's table and makes him the master of the Universe. Through its vague religious and moral concepts New Age pushes man toward that medieval superstitious world within which there is no certitude, no well-defined theological system and no absolute dogma. New Age allows man to freely express his aberrant thoughts, to dream, to contemplate the beauty of ignorance and to live obsolete magical conceptions such as dragons or fairies, which can survive only under the sign of the unknown and supernatural. And, as long as man is tormented by monotony, frustration and ignorance, mysticism will manage to survive by feeding our natural hunger for mysteries and out-of-the-ordinary things.

7.3. THE MAYA PSEUDO-PROPHECY AND THE YEAR 2012

The Maya pseudo-prophecy for the year 2012 was the most widespread apocalyptic phenomenon ever recorded. It shattered the cultural, social and religious barriers and it manifested itself within nations that had nothing to do with Christianity or with Maya culture. Hundreds of books, articles, video documentaries and websites discussed and analyzed this subject. An army of astrologers, writers, contactees, mediums, prophets and spiritual healers begged for attention screaming that in 2012 something extraordinary was about to happen with Earth and its inhabitants. And their efforts were mercilessly amplified by the media and the Internet, both flooded by clichés such as "turning point in the history of humanity," "year of great changes" or "the special significance of the year 2012." A virtual domain owned by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) received more than

5,000 questions from the public on this subject, some asking if they should suicide, kill their kids or pets, make provisions of food and water or take shelter in bunkers. [1134]

The 2012 phenomenon came into being because in the year 2012 an important cycle of the Maya calendar ended – an aspect interpreted as a prophecy about the end of the world – and because any effect related to this calendrical event could directly affect us. All the other apocalyptic theories were speculations that deformed the truth.

There are two general points of view regarding time in the world:

(1) The linear time – mainly promoted by the Abrahamic religions. These say that time is unique; it started to flow at the moment of Creation and it is not known if it will be stopped by God in the future (the end of the world does not necessarily involve the end of time).

(2) The cyclic time – promoted by Amerindian and Hindu religions, together with modern, neopagan and New Age systems of belief. The idea of cyclic time, as the idea of reincarnation, is inspired by the cycles of seasons and other cycles of nature. The ancient Hindu elaborated a system of four successive *yugas* (a sort of ages of the world) of moral decadence which have a temporal length according to the proportion 4:3:2:1. Thus, the Hindu model of time was divided into a *satya yuga* of 1,728,000 years, *treta yuga* of 1,296,000 years, *dvapara yuga* of 864,000 years, and the final age, of ultimate depravity, *kali yuga* of 432,000 years (the current age). After *kali yuga* the Universe will be completely destroyed, an age of emptiness will last unknown eons of time, and the entire cycle will repeat again, endlessly. [1135]

The Maya also had a cyclic conception about time and several methods to measure time, all based on the vigesimal numeral system (base 20) and on the mystical significance of the value 13. Their basic calendar, *tzolk'in* , was composed of the combination of a cycle of 20 days with a cycle of 13 numbers; it took 260 days to complete (20 x 13). *Haab* was the 365 days calendar. The starting points of *tzolk'in* and *haab* overlap every 52 years, which corresponds to the cycle of Venus. And the Maya also had the Long Count, used to measure temporal distances larger than 52 years. The Long Count contained *k'in* ("day"), *uinal* (a cycle of 20 *k'ins*), *tun* (a cycle of 18

uinals), *k’atun* (a cycle of 20 *tuns*), *b’ak’tun* (a cycle of 20 *k’atuns*), *piktun* (cycle of 20 *b’ak’tuns*), *kalabtun* (a cycle of 20 *piktuns*), *kinichiltun* (a cycle o 20 *kalabtuns*) and *alautun* (a cycle of 20 *kinichiltuns* , which is 64,000,000 *tu* , or around 60 million years). *Tun* means “stone”; the Maya calendar was written in stone and it had the purpose to keep track of the religious ceremonies. [1136]

The South American cultural conceptions regarding time, creation and death were diverse. According to *Popol Vuh* , a compilation of mythical stories of the Maya tribe K’iche’, the gods created three failed ages (or worlds), followed by a successful fourth age in which they placed mankind (the Aztecs had five ages of different length [1137]). The Maya placed the beginning of the Long Count at the end of the third age, which lasted a cycle of 13 *b’ak’tuns* . Hence, apparently, the fourth age was to end upon the completion of 13 *b’ak’tuns* as well. [1138]

Attempts to correlate the Mesoamerican calendar with the Western European one have been made since the first contacts between Europeans and natives in the 16th century. But, given the fact that there are different approaches regarding the system of numeration and the flowing of time between civilizations, the calendrical correlation has been a never-ending discussion. At the moment there are over 20 versions regarding the moment when the Long Count begins, varying between 3512 BC and 2594 BC. Of all, the version propounded by Eric Thompson in the 1920s was the most accepted in the academic environment. Thompson calculated that the first day of the current Maya age was the date of August 11, 3114 BC in the proleptic Gregorian calendar, the day when, mythically speaking, the planet Venus was born. [1139] Accordingly, if one *b’ak’tun* is equal to 144,000 *k’ins* (“days”), the 13 *b’ak’tuns* are equal to 5,125.36 years. And if 5,125.36 years are added to August 11, 3114 BC, then the fourth age ended on December 21, 2012.

Thompson had no interest in eschatology and he did not speak about an end of Creation; on the contrary; he was not even sure about the calculations and the calendrical interpretations he had made. [1140] In parallel, at the beginning of the 1900s the German scholar Ernst Förstemann interpreted the last page of *Codex Dresdensis* , a Maya book from around 11th century, as a representation of a global flood. Förstemann made reference to the end of the

world, but he mentioned nothing about the end of the 13th *b'ak'tun* or 2012. Nor is it clear if his point of view referred to an event from Maya history or to a future event. [1141] The archaeologist Sylvanus Morley had the same opinion, writing in 1915 that "on the last page of the manuscript, is depicted the Destruction of the World ... here, indeed, is portrayed with a graphic touch the final all-engulfing cataclysm" under the form of a flood. [1142] So, scientifically speaking, the moment of the end of the 13 *b'ak'tuns* and the significance of this event are issues far from being clear. But, given that December 21, 2012, marked the winter solstice, an event with powerful astrological and astronomical significances, the apocalyptic speculators took the conclusions of the academics and adapted them to their own opinions. The comments of the early Mayanists created small snow-balls that over the years picked up the flakes of amateur astronomers, Maya devotees, spiritualists, New Age writers, and turned into a mystic avalanche. By 2012 the so-called Maya apocalypse became an eschatological vortex absorbing the wildest catastrophic or transformative scenarios.

Roughly, there were two points of view, separated by a thin line, regarding the 2012 apocalypse. On the one hand, there was the New Age movement, which depicted 2012 as the start of a new level of existence. Mankind was on the verge of a physical and spiritual transformation in the Age of Aquarius, leaving behind the decadent Age of Pisces. On the other hand, there were advocates of extinction, for whom mankind was about to experience a diverse palette of catastrophic events: geomagnetic reversal, deadly solar flares, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, comet collision, alien invasions or rogue planets colliding with Earth. Many of these scenarios initially circulated in the 1990s, referring to the beginning of the third millennium. But after the failure of the year 2000 they had been recycled and applied to the year 2012.

In 1957 the Mayanist Maud Makemson wrote that "the completion of a Great Period of 13 b'ak'tuns would have been of the utmost significance to the Maya." [1143] In 1966 Michael Coe "ambitiously" suggested in his book *The Maya* that Armageddon would overtake the degenerate peoples of the world and all Creation on the final day of the 13th *b'ak'tun* . [1144] In 1975 the end of the 13th *b'ak'tun* became the point of transformation of the global consciousness when Frank Waters related the date to astrology and to the prophecies of the Hopi Amerindians. [1145] In 1995 in India Guru Kalki

Bhagavan proclaimed the year 2012 as the beginning of the golden age of divine illumination. The approximately 15 million followers considered Bhagavan to be the incarnation of the god Vishnu and 2012 as the end of *kali yuga* . [1146] For José Argüelles the coincidence between the 144,000 days of a *b'ak'tun* and the 144,000 saints from Revelation 14:1 was an irrefutable proof of the importance of the year 2012. On August 17, 1987, Argüelles organized the event of the "Harmonic Convergence," which consisted in gathering 144,000 people to signal the beginning of the end of history. The event was held in different mystical places on Earth: Mount Shasta, Mount Fuji, Machu Picchu or the Great Pyramid of Giza. According to Argüelles, in 3113 BC Earth began a corridor through the aura emanated by the center of our galaxy, at the end of which, on December 21, 2012, mankind had to suffer a profound spiritual transformation. The Maya, allegedly, aligned their calendar to correspond to this phenomenon. In 2007 in an interview for *The New York Times* magazine Argüelles declared that "the post-2012 world will be a world of universal telepathy" and "there will be a lot fewer of us, with simple lifestyles, solar technology, garden culture and lots of telepathic communication." But 2012 was not only about flowers, love and happiness, because those who "have not evolved spiritually enough to know that there are other dimensions of reality" had to be taken away in "silver ships." [1147]

Science was repeatedly hijacked to support a variety of overdramatized theories. In 1975 Dennis and Terence McKenna spoke about a galactic alignment between Earth and the center of the Milky Way. They attempted to demonstrate that the Maya based their calendar on a strip of dark clouds from the Milky Way called *Xibalba be* or the "Dark Rift." The Dark Rift is emanated from the center of the galaxy, and when the alignment would take place it would create a combined gravitational effect between the Sun and the supermassive black hole (Sagittarius A*) from the center of the Milky Way that would destroy Earth. This theory was enthusiastically adopted by John Major Jenkins, who stated that the Maya anticipated this alignment, included it in their cosmology and celebrated it as the harbinger of a global spiritual transition. [1148]

The so-called galactic alignment further generated the mystical theory of Earth's resonance, the mother of all aberrant theories. Allegedly, Earth's resonance began to grow in 1980 and it was going to reach the climax in

2012. This meant that the flow of time was accelerating; in 2009 the day was supposed to be only 16 hours long instead of 24 due to the fact that the resonance had 12 cycles per second instead of 7.83 cycles per second. As 2012 was approaching, mankind had to experience lots of global climate changes with effects of social anarchy. On December 21, 2012, time was supposed to reach point zero, mankind to gain a higher vibrational frequency and the physical bodies to transform into bodies of light in the fifth dimension. [1149]

In 2006 Daniel Pinchbeck linked the end of the 13 *b'ak'tuns* to New Age beliefs, crop circles, alien abductions and revelations received from the Mesoamerican deity Quetzalcoatl. [1150] One year later Lawrence Joseph alerted about a huge black hole situated in the center of the galaxy that absorbs matter, energy and distorts time. Due to its influence, Earth was going to experience fluctuations in the magnetic field, the Sun to behave unusually and our solar system to enter a violent part of the galaxy. On December 21, 2012, mankind had to be completely obliterated or accede to a new level of existence. [1151]

Astronomically speaking, the concept of galactic equator is very arbitrary and, at least at the moment, it cannot be accurately traced because the boundaries of the Milky Way are not precisely determined. The galactic equator was defined on abstract bases and not on physical markers or characteristics. Accordingly, no one can determine or see the alignment of the Sun with the galactic center. There is indeed a Dark Rift of the Milky Way, but this consists only of a series of molecular dust clouds; it has nothing to do with spiritual transitions or human evolution. To make matters clear, two celestial bodies can influence each other only through gravity – as the Moon's gravity causes the terrestrial tides or the Sun's gravity makes the planets revolve around it – and the force of gravity is conditioned by distance. Even if the Sun and Earth do align with the center of the Milky Way, the two cosmic points are separated by 27,000 light-years, which excludes any influence of this kind. [1152]

Although it sounds nice every time there are rumors about astrological or astronomical apocalypses, in 2012 there was no planetary alignment. And even if there was one, planetary alignments are harmless; they have nothing

to do with Earth's tectonic movements or with giant waves. Planetary alignments that involve three planets plus the Sun are a common phenomenon, which does not affect Earth. Jupiter is the largest planet of the solar system, larger than all the other planets put together. And yet, when Jupiter, Earth and the Sun align (in this order), our planet feels less than 1% of the gravitational force constantly exercised by the Moon. [1153]

Another scenario was the geomagnetic reversal (not to be confused with pole shift), which could have caused chaos in human society and among the creatures that use Earth's electromagnetic field to orient themselves during migrations. [1154] A geomagnetic reversal is indeed possible, but, when it happens, it stretches over a period of thousands or millions of years. Due to the fact it is an extremely slow process, it is impossible to determine when it begins and when it ends. The geomagnetic reversal was said to be caused by a massive solar storm or by the near Dark Rift. While solar radiations or those emanated by other celestial bodies could seriously affect the electrical grid, satellites and telecommunication networks, they cannot influence the manner in which Earth emanates its electromagnetic field. The only source of geomagnetism is Earth's core.

The theory of Nibiru was even more ridiculous. Sometimes called "Planet X," Nibiru was said to be a rogue planet that was going to collide with Earth. This idea was advanced in 1995 by the contactee Nancy Lieder after she had channelling experiences with extraterrestrial beings called "Zeta." Initially, the collision was expected to take place in 2003, but, because nothing happened, in 2012 the theory was recycled. [1155] The theory of Nibiru is confuted not only by elementary astronomy, but also by common sense. An object the size of a planet would be spotted with telescopes years before the impact and with the naked eye at least days before the impact.

There was also the Photon Belt theory, a form of interaction between Earth and Alcyone, the brightest star in the Pleiades star cluster. The theory circulated before the year 2000 as well, when it was said that on May 5, 1997, our solar system entered the Photon Belt, a field of ethereal energy that floats in space. This was supposed to give rise to extraordinary spiritual and material phenomena. [1156] Indeed, the Pleiades star cluster had a special role in South American culture, [1157] but the distance of approximately 400 light-

years dismisses any influence.

The reactions to this bombardment of theories varied; for some it was a question of money, for others it was a matter of life and death. In the Mesoamerican countries that once were part of Maya civilization – Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador – 2012 was an opportunity for joy and business. They all organized cultural festivities to commemorate the end of the 13th *b'ak'tun* at the largest Maya sites, expecting hundreds of thousands of tourists. [1158]

The film industry was also aware of the financial potential of the phenomenon. Following the same tactic as *Armageddon* or *Deep Impact* before 2000, *2012* (2009), alongside other low-budget productions, was Hollywood's take on the subject. Together with commercials and products which, more or less, made references to the 2012 apocalypse, the end of the Maya calendar turned into a commercial joke with uncontrollable effects.

A major side-effect of the 2012 phenomenon had little to do with the external forces that could actually destroy the planet and everything to do with the very human reaction to such panic; it agitated some people to such an extent that they contemplated killing themselves. This was not unprecedented, previous examples of suicides taking place when the Large Hadron Collider was switched on in 2008 [1159] or on the occasion of the rapture prophecy on May 21, 2011. [1160] Fear-mongering preys on people who are most vulnerable, possibly triggering them to do things that normally they may not. The 2012 phenomenon was responsible for at least one suicide, a 16-year-old girl in the United Kingdom. [1161] On October 11, 2012, in the Brazilian city of Teresina, police interrupted a possible mass suicide planned by around 100 adherents of Luis Pereira dos Santos. The latter prophesied the end of the world on the feast day of Our Lady of Aparecida. [1162] And on December 21, 2012, the mountain Cerro Uritorco from Argentina was closed, as a mass suicide had been proposed on Facebook to take place there. [1163]

In other cases it is difficult to determine if the Maya event was used for touristic purposes or for veritable New Age beliefs. Various locations throughout the world, especially mountains, were seen as emanating mystical energies. In the year 2000 the small French village of Bugarach began to be visited by people who believed that the local mountain, Pic de Bugarach, was

the ideal location to take shelter from the transformative events of 2012. In 2011 more than 20,000 people climbed to the top, perceived as an important UFO site. [1164] The Turkish village of Sirince, near Ephesus, expected to receive over 60,000 visitors on December 21, 2012, as New Age mystics believed its “positive energy” would protect them from any catastrophe. [1165] Even the mountain of Rtanj, in the Serbian Carpathians, believed to hide an alien pyramid within it, attracted people who expected the activation of a protective force shield of energy during the day in question. [1166]

In Brazil, the mayor of the city of São Francisco de Paula mobilized the population to prepare for the end of the world by stocking up food and water. [1167] In the city of Corguinho, in the Mato Grosso do Sul, a colony was built for the survivors of the expected tragedy. [1168]

Similar actions were taken in the United States. Sales of blast shelters increased noticeably after 2009. [1169] In addition, officials feared induced apocalypses through violence, so schools were closed for the Christmas holidays two days early in the state of Michigan. [1170]

Surprisingly, the Chinese took the end of the world very seriously. According to a pool made in May 2012, about 10% of the world’s population believed that the world might end in December; the largest percent was in China, where the *2012* smash hit convinced about 20% of the citizens that the end was near. [1171] As a consequence, many hoarded supplies of food, water and candles in anticipation of coming darkness, one built an ark, others donated their savings, [1172] and up to 1,000 members of the Christian cult Church of the Almighty God were arrested after claiming that the spiritual renewal involves the overthrow of the *status quo* . [1173]

Unfortunately, the spreading of the 2012 phenomenon confirmed not only the avidity of the modern man for sensational, but also his lack of scientific literacy. In 1950 Linda Schele and David Freidel strongly argued that the Maya had not conceived the end of the fourth age as an end of Creation. [1174] Likewise, Mark Van Stone showed that the ancient Mesoamerican prophecies or calendars have nothing to do with calamities, and the 2012 apocalypse was a modern fabrication with commercial purposes. [1175] In 2009 the archeoastronomer Anthony Aveni stated that, while the idea of a cosmic balance was indeed part of Maya culture, the 2012 fatalistic scenarios were

products of an imbalanced and “disconnected” society, incapable to find answers to mankind’s great dilemmas. Accordingly, it has turned its attention to distant spatial-temporal imaginary entities gifted with extraordinary knowledge. Aveni also pointed out that most of the apocalyptic prophets damn the contemporary science and technology, but they frequently use pseudoscientific concepts. [1176]

The Maya apocalypse was only a matter of smoke and mirrors. As any other ancient civilization on the globe, the Maya deified the sky and associated celestial bodies with supernatural beings and extraordinary places. But there is a long way from placing a couple of stones in astral positions to black holes and photon belts. UFO fanatics and modern mystics commonly mythicize the history of the American continent by stating that ancient South-American civilizations were very advanced from a technological and social point of view. But the naked truth is that they were so “advanced” that they had been dismantled by a handful of conquistadors armed with primitive rifles and carrying smallpox. As Olmec culture before them, the Maya had been a Neolithic people: they did not discover the wheel, had no beasts of burden, and only toward the end of their civilization they did use copper, gold and silver in religious objects. [1177] They left no proof that they had known about spherical Earth, planetary positions, galactic centers, orbits, interstellar dust, solar spots, solar storms, electromagnetic fields, cosmic rays, black holes, rogue planets or gravity. These are only fanciful theories vomited by the sick modern imagination.

The 2012 myth was contradicted even by Maya culture itself. The ancient inscriptions occasionally mention commemorations that could happen long after the completion of the 13 *b’ak’tun* . [1178] There is an inscription on the western panel at the Temple of the Inscriptions in Palenque that projects a very distant future moment connected to the reign of the king K’inich Janaab’ Pakal. The inscription mentions Pakal’s birth date on March 24, 603 AD, together with the date of October 21, 4772 AD. The latter represents the 80th calendrical round of 52 years from 615 AD, when Pakal was crowned. This text, which places an event more than 2,500 years after 2012, is the best proof that the Maya did not envision the end of the 13th *b’ak’tun* as the end of Creation, but only as the beginning of another calendrical cycle. [1179] It is true that the completion of a *b’ak’tun* could have been an occasion of great

celebration for the Maya, but in the same way the modern world celebrated the transition from the second millennium to the third.

The real existential problems of the Maya were the legitimacy of the succession to power, wars of conquest, reconciliation of the gods through blood sacrifices and survival among tribal enemies. In this context, the purpose of their calendar was not to predict new ages, or at least not ages of love, peace and unity. True, they might have used the completion of a temporal cycle as a motive to build new pyramids, to offer legitimacy to a new royal ascension or to start a new war. But their main concern was not to inaugurate a new order of things, but to preserve the existing one; this guaranteed their survival. Maya culture was violent and dominated by superstition. The human sacrifices were meant to reconcile the irritable gods to further tolerate their society. The Maya were totally uninterested in peace, love and meditation. On the contrary; they were above all interested in keeping the traditions, fearing that, if not respected, they would be drastically punished by the gods. So, the last thing the Maya could be accused of is that they had New Age ideas, were good to nature, to people or to animals, prophesied the end of the world in 2012 or they anticipated the coming of a new age of love and peace.

8. THE SELF-DESTRUCTIVE APOCALYPSES OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

The current apocalyptic scenarios are predominantly self-destructive, in which humans, not the divine, are the entities that might put an end to mankind. The world has become scared of itself, of the power it acquired and the damage it can cause through irresponsible actions. We have all heard, more or less, about global warming, financial collapse, the clash of civilizations, nuclear holocaust or resource exhaustion. But less visible is the common cause of all these possibilities: the overpopulation of the planet, amplified by the lack of education and greed.

The world’s population has continued to grow since the Black Death. From approximately 350 millions in the 14th century, it reached the one billion milestone at the beginning of the 19th century. This aspect caught the

attention of the English thinker Thomas Malthus, who stated that the continuous growth of population might, at some point, deplete the resources of food, which would further cause chaos, war, and ultimately a violent reset of civilization. [1180] But the Malthusian predictions did not come true and the overpopulation issue began to be globally debated only 150 years later. Due to the development of medicine, agriculture production and social protection policies, the most significant increase of population occurred in the second half of the 20th century. In the 1950s there were little over 2.5 billion people; 30 years later the number rose to over 4.5 billion. Although since the 1980s the birth rate decreased, especially in the developed countries, [1181] in July 2015 the world's population was estimated at 7.3 billion people. [1182]

Overpopulation entails consequences that can hardly be predicted in detail; they are rather sketched. In fact, the problem is not necessarily the large number of people, but the need for space and resources of every individual. Man is a greedy being and greed is instinctual; it can hardly be controlled. In most part of our existence as a species we lived in hunger and scarcity. During that time greed was beneficial because it forced us to take advantage of every opportunity, to accumulate and to consume as much resources as possible in order to increase our chances of survival. But, ever since the Industrial Revolution allowed man to harness increasingly more resources with increasingly less energy, greed has turned against us in many ways.

The real challenge is to determine the relation between the number of people and the standard of living our planet can sustain. Earth's resources are limited and exhaustible. As long as man is conditioned by the technology he possesses and by the limited resources offered by the mother planet, the number of people and the lifestyle are inversely proportional. A luxurious lifestyle involves a greater consumption of resources and energy per individual and demands a reduced population. On the contrary; a precarious lifestyle means a lower consumption of resources and energy per individual, which allows a numerous population. Following the *domino* effect, if population grows too much in relation to its standard of life, this means a (rapid) depletion of resources, which further causes social stress, migrations, revolutions and wars.

Depending on the used estimate, overpopulation already occurred or it is

about to occur. The largest population growth takes place in Asian and African countries with a low/average standard of living. By contrast, European and American countries curbed their population growth in order to have a high standard of life. The problem is that the American lifestyle, luxurious, ultra-consumerist, is also followed by the poor countries, with numerous population. The world's population is expected to grow up to nine billion between 2040 and 2050. [1183] If the tendency of growing population and its enrichment continues, the demand for natural resources will increase, which will subsequently lead to deforestation, extinction of plants and animals and, paradoxically, will cause a decline in living conditions by aggravating global warming.

In essence, global warming refers to the increase in the average temperature of Earth's atmosphere and oceans due to deforestation and releasing chemical agents into the atmosphere resulted from human activities, especially burning fossil fuels (oil, coal, natural gases). The greenhouse effect, which generates global warming, was noticed at the beginning of the 19th century, but it came to the public attention only in the 1950s. In the last 100 years the average temperature of Earth increased by almost 0.8 degrees Celsius, two-thirds of this increase occurring only between 1980 and 2010. [1184] It may not sound like much, but the effects can already be seen in the rise of the sea level, the melting of glaciers, the decrease of the amount of snow and occasional extreme weather events. In the 21st century the average temperature from the surface of the planet is expected to increase by 2.9 degrees Celsius in the most optimistic scenario, and up to 6.4 degrees Celsius in the most pessimistic one. [1185] It all depends on the number of people, lifestyle and available technologies.

For now, the impact of climate change is mostly felt by the people living on small islands and at high latitude. But global warming inevitably affect billions of people through floods, severe droughts, reduction of water supply, increase of malnutrition and various effects on overall health. [1186] A rise of the global temperature leads to the melt of the glaciers at the poles, the rise of the sea level, the change of rainfall patterns and possibly an expansion of the subtropical deserts. Other effects of global warming include the occurrence with a higher frequency of weather extremes such as waves of heat or cold, typhoons, the extinction of some species due to heat variations and crop

failures. The warming and the related effects will vary from region to region. In a scenario of four degrees Celsius the limits of human adaptability will be exceeded in many parts of the globe, while the adaptation limits of the natural system will be exceeded on even larger areas. Consequently, the ecosystems human existence relies on will fail and subsequently mankind's fate will become uncertain as well. [1187] In case pollution will continue in the same rhythm, glaciers – which have the role of maintaining a thermal balance by reflecting sunlight – will continue to melt, global warming will increase and it will become irreversible around the year 2030.

In response to this threat, numerous regulations have been made across the globe related to pollution, nature protection or restoration of the natural environment where it has been damaged. The most visible trend is the selective waste collection and recycling, so that the route of the resources is circular, self-sustainable, and not linear. Likewise, there is a global tendency to invest money and manpower in ecological businesses. Governments stimulate their citizens to purchase ecological goods, while private companies are turning to the production of environmentally friendly and more energy-efficient cars, machinery and electronics. It can be said that there is a collective effort to establish a balance between technological capabilities, consumption and breeding.

For most experts and common people global warming is caused by human actions. Yet, a handful of voices prefer another point of view, assigning the global warming phenomenon to the mechanics of nature. It is a well-known scientific fact that climate can change for a lot of reasons, not only chemical pollution. [1188] Changes in the brightness of the Sun (which has cycles), volcanic eruptions, comet collision or imperceptible changes of our planet's orbit can cause severe variations of temperature. [1189] Earth's orbital cycles are slowly varying, stretching over periods of tens of thousands of years. The current natural tendency of Earth is, paradoxically, to head toward a new ice age. [1190] The counter-theory of the natural global warming relies on examples such as the Medieval Warm Period (between the 10th and the 13th century) and the Little Ice Age (between the 14th and the 19th century), periods of hundreds of years when Earth had a higher and then a lower average temperature. Human beings had no influence upon these climatic anomalies, so the natural mechanisms that caused them can only be

speculated. [1191]

Time will tell if the threat of global warming is natural or man-made. But, regardless of its nature, global warming is a test of the human viability. Until the end of the 21st century mankind might be forced to prove that intelligent life is not another failed experiment on Mother Nature's long list. In the meantime, prophecies and messianism will become fewer and fewer, they will continue to be part of our culture for a long time from now. On the other hand, the apocalyptic predictions will appear and disappear depending on how mankind will be able to deal with the problems it will face. An infinity of Armageddons are waiting to be shouted. [1192] If the world does not self-destruct through pollution and wars, several future possible end-time dates have already been stated. And there is no doubt that, as in the case of 2012, some of these prophecies will become famous and will generate commercial and religious activities alike. In the near future the year 2033 is important for Christianity because it apparently marks 2,000 years from the crucifixion of Christ. Coincidentally, this date is also close to the moment Earth might be irreversibly damaged by pollution and global warming. And because the entrance into the Age of Aquarius is ambiguous, this will be tied to any other important calculation or event.

For the distant future there are the prophetic calculations of the physicist Isaac Newton, who came to a special conclusion regarding the year 2060. Likewise, in the year 2240 6,000 years will be fulfilled since the creation of the world according to the Jewish calendar as it was set by Maimonides. [1193] And if these dates seem distant, they are no match for the most distant apocalyptic prediction: the chemical death of the Sun. Astrophysicists appreciate that over five billion years the Sun will deplete its reserves of hydrogen and it will turn into an immense red star. In this process it will emanate much more heat and light than at the moment, and it will expand so much that it will swallow the first three planets of the solar system. Of course, until that moment no one can say what will happen with mankind. But, as long as it is entirely dependent on the planet Earth, our fate as a species is uncertain. In order to assure its survival, our species must become multi-planetary. In most part of our history we naively believed that heaven is the house of the divine and there, if we arrive, we live forever. Today, all data show that, at least to some extent, we have been right. Our existence has

depended on the stars and it will depend on the stars, because the only way we can avoid the fate of dinosaurs is to fulfill our millenary dream and reach them.

CONCLUSIONS

Religion is dying. The concept of divinity is dying. The better we understand nature, the more cornered divinity becomes. From animal shapes to living energy, and from the top of the mountains to the spiritual dimension, divinity has changed its shape and residence according to the development of our knowledge. It constantly runs from our eyes, from our judgement. And it does not hide from us only in spatial gaps, but also in temporal gaps. In all religions it acts upon the world in a visible and irrefutable way in dimensions inaccessible to man of the past and the future. But never in the present. We all know the stories: divinity created the world, created life, created the first humans, became flesh, healed the sick, talked to people, destroyed nations, moved mountains or directly changed social and political orders. And he also revealed to us in the past that he will do equally marvelous things in the future. Divinity promised that he will act through signs and events, only to ultimately interrupt the historical course and fundamentally change the existing order of things. But this thing has not happened. And he is completely missing from here and now. While it is true that our scientific understanding is at the beginning and we still have not answered fundamental questions, there is no reason to conclude that at the end of the spatial and temporal lines a good, all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present entity awaits us with his open arms at his rich table. Divinity has run out of options and the multimillenary game of hide and seek is close to the end. Divinity has became so abstract, so void of substance and so shapeless that it can be anything, anywhere and anytime: a feeling in our heart, a thought in our mind or an energy in another universe where the known laws of physics do not apply. The divine became a blank paper which can be filled by believers with whatever they want to be filled.

Religion is an expired paradigm. It can no longer explain reality. Attempting to reconcile it with the scientific paradigm through intellectual contortionism is futile. Science does have moral value and it can tell us what is moral and

what is not. Morality consists in the choices we make according to our own knowledge. Each one's morality differs from the other's morality solely based on knowledge. Knowledge is what makes us better and different us from animals. Knowledge is what grants man powers over nature, enlarges the scope of free will and restricts the one of determinism. Knowledge is what makes order into chaos and makes the difference between determining and being determined. There is no reason without freedom, as there is no freedom without knowledge. Belief suppresses knowledge, reason and ultimately freedom.

And, finally, all the theories, all the ideas, all the calculations, doctrines or revelations about the end of the world are useless in the face of the individual end. Death is a certainty. And for every one of us death is a personal end of the world. For those who have died there is no turning back and it does not matter if this world has 20, 543 or 1,000 years of existence left. There is no difference between the end of the individual life and the end of the world; they both have the same effect. Death separates man from this world once and for all, exactly as this world would end. Our lives can shatter at any moment, whether this thing happens though the spectacular descent of a god from the sky or following a trivial car crash. There is no utility in knowing the moment of the general end without knowing the time of your own individual end. Personal time has the same value as general time. Life can be many things, but it is surely not meant to be lived in fear of imaginary friends. The ultimate goal of every individual is to concentrate upon life, to explore, to intellectually and morally grow and to contribute to the improvement of the human condition.

NOTES

[1] . In 7th-century crypt of abbot Mellebaudis, near Poitiers, France, the following inscription was found: “Alpha and Omega. The beginning and the end. All things are getting worse as days pass, because the end is approaching.” (Edmont Le Blant, *Nouveau recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule antérieures au VIIIe siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale 1892), 259-60).

[2] . The same idea is expressed by the historian Edward Gibbon: “There exists in human nature a strong propensity to depreciate the advantages, and to magnify the evils, of the present times.” (Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* , vol. 4 (London: T. Cadell, 1837), 492).

[3] . Lemi Gemil Mecari, *Apocalipsa biblică* (Bucureşti: Ştefan, 2010), 39-56, 108-19, 139-41, 145-7.

[4] . Frederico Santangelo, *Divination, Prediction and the End of the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 116-7; Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* , vol. 3 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1826), 253.

[5] . In the Abrahamic branch are also included smaller religions as Baha’i, Samaritanism, Yazidi or Rastafarianism.

[6] . All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *The American Standard Translation of the Holy Bible, Standard Edition* version (Thomas Nelson & Sons: New York, 1901). Fair use.

[7] . Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (Springfield: Behrman House, 1973), 199-205.

[8] . Ibid., 136-51.

[9] . Ibid., 72-80.

[10] . For more details about the Messiah, see Catalin Negru, “The messianic phenomenon,” Reason and Religion, accessed May 11, 2017, http://reasonandreligion.org/index.php/the-messianic-phenomenon.

[11] . Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* , 292-300.

[12] . Abraham Cohen, *The Teachings of Maimonides* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1927), 228-30.

[13]. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote about lots of messianic manifestations, but Theudas and Judas of Galilee are also mentioned in the New Testament: “For before these days rose up Theudas, giving himself out to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were dispersed, and came to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the enrolment, and drew away [some of the] people after him: he also perished; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad” (Acts 5:36-37).

[14]. The Holy Temple refers to a series of structures located on Mount Moriah. The first Temple was built by King Solomon, sometime between 970 and 930 BC, replacing the Tabernacle of Moses, local sanctuaries and occasional altars built on hills. The first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC, when they conquered Jerusalem. So, two temples had been built on this site and a third temple will be built according to Jewish eschatology.

[15]. For details, see Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[16]. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* , 211-2, 317.

[17]. The Seven Laws of Noah were given by God to Noah for all mankind. Any non-Jew who lives in accordance with these rules has assured a place in the afterlife. These are: (1) not to worship idols; (2) not to commit murder; (3) not to commit adultery or incest; (4) not to eat a limb torn from a living animal; (5) not to blaspheme; (6) not to steal; (7) to have an adequate system of law and justice (Ibid., 285).

[18]. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* , 95-6.

[19]. A frequently used example is the Book of Isaiah, written in the 8th century BC: “Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:1).

[20]. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* , vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 281.

[21]. The word “Trinity” is nowhere in the Bible expressly mentioned, but it emerges from the interpretation of the text: Jesus says to his apostles: “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19); Abraham is visited by God in the form of three persons: “three men stood over against him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, My lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant” (Genesis 18:2-3); God speaks with himself in several stances in a plural sense: “And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? (Isaiah 6:8); “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26); “And Jehovah God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Genesis 3:22); Jesus Christ says in Revelation that he is the beginning and the end of all things, the primordial and the final cause of all, aspects that place him in the position of God: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

[22]. Bernard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine: From the First Century to the Present* (Kitchener: Fortress Press, 1966), 37-80.

[23]. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 52.

[24]. Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 156-64.

[25]. Meyer Waxman, *History of the Jewish Literature* , vol. 6 (Kingsport: Kingsport Press, 1941), 1035; Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs* , 64, 111, 241; Moncure Daniel Conway, *Demonology and Devil-Lore* , vol. 2 (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1879), 247.

[26]. Osborne, *Revelation* , 606-17.

[27]. Ibid., 496, 617.

[28]. Irene Belyeu, *Revelation in Context* (Maitland: Xulon Press, 2006), 301-4.

[29]. In accordance with the Nicene Creed, the new Orthodox versions of the Bible use “thousands of years” (plural) instead of “a thousand years” (singular).

[30]. Juan Eduardo Campo, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 559.

[31]. Ibid., 570-1.

[32]. Ibid., 34-5.

[33]. Ibid., 396-7.

[34]. Allama Mohammed Baqir Majlisi, *Essence of Life: A Translation of Ain al-Hayat* , trans. Sayed Tahir Bilgrami (Qum: Ansarian Publications, 2005), 103-5.

[35]. Campo, *Encyclopedia* , 603-4.

[36]. Ibid., 447.

[37]. Ibid., 447-8; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi’ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 166-8.

[38]. Momen, *An Introduction* , 169-72.

[39]. Campo, *Encyclopedia* , 43, 413-4.

[40] . Jane Idelman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89.

[41] . Charles Upton, *Legends of the End: Prophecies of the End Times, Antichrist, Apocalypse, and Messiah from Eight Religious Traditions* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 29-31.

[42] . Ibid., 50-4.

[43] . Ibid., 16-8.

[44] . Premonition and clairvoyance are different things. Premonition refers to knowing the future; clairvoyance refers to knowing the present, to real-time visions about events that take place at great distances.

[45] . Robert Todd Carroll, *The Skeptic's Dictionary: A Collection of Strange Beliefs, Amusing Deceptions, and Dangerous Delusions* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 102-3.

[46] . Nephi Lowell Morris, *Prophecies of Joseph Smith and Their Fulfillment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1920), v.

[47] . At that time the institution of the Papacy was not yet established. But later, in order to avoid confusions, all the former bishops of Rome have been retroactively entitled "popes."

[48] . Richard Abanes, *End-Time Visions: The Road to Armageddon?* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 165.

[49] . In the 2nd century, in Phrygia, Asia Minor, Montanus preached that the miracle of Pentecost (Acts 2:2-3) marked the beginning of the Age of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended not only upon the apostles, but upon every person converted to the Christian religion. All Christians are full of spirit and sinless, without the possibility to commit other sins. God has dual nature, he can take the form of man or woman, while the end of world was close. Nevertheless, Christ was going to descend for the second time the town of Pepuza, Montanus's birthplace, which was to become the New Jerusalem and the host of God's throne (Abanes, *End-Time Visions* , 164-5).

[50] . Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series: The Seven Ecumenical Councils* , vol. 14 (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 123-60.

[51] . The destruction of Babylon by the Medes is also prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah: "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who shall not regard silver, and as for gold, they shall not delight in it" (Isaiah 13:17); "Jehovah hath stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes; because his purpose is against Babylon, to destroy it" (Jeremiah 51:11).

[52] . Hippolytus, "Treatise on Christ and Antichrist," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century* , vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York:

Cosimo, 2007), 210.

[53] . In other interpretations the four beasts represent Babylon, Medes, Persia and the Greek-Macedonian Empire, while the ten horns symbolize the ten kings who succeeded Alexander within the Seleucid Empire. The "little horn" is identified with the person of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Accordingly, Daniel 7:25 might be a reference to the persecution brought by Antiochus, who attempted to suppress Judaism and to force the Jews to adopt the Greek traditions (John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 424-5).

[54] . Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," V.26, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* , vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 554; chapter 26 in book 5 of *Adversus Haereses* is relevantly entitled: "John and Daniel have predicted the dissolution and desolation of the Roman Empire, which shall precede the end of the world and the eternal Kingdom of Christ. The Gnostics are refuted, those tools of Satan, who invent another Father different from the Creator."

[55] . Some versions of the Bible use "times" in accordance with the Nicene Creed, while others use "two times."

[56] . Ignatius, "The Epistle to Hero. A Deacon of Antioch," 2, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* , vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 113.

[57] . Hippolytus, "Expository Treatise Against the Jews," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century* , vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 220.

[58] . Hippolytus, "Treatise on Christ and Antichrist," 207.

[59] . Ibid., 209.

[60] . Ibid.

[61] . Ibid., 206.

[62] . Francis X. Gumerlock, "The Overwhelming Presence of Nero in Early Apocalypse Commentaries" (paper presented at National Prophecy Conference, Ridgecrest, North Carolina, June 1-4, 2011, 9), accessed January 15, 2014, http://francisgumerlock.com/wp-content/uploads/Gumerlock-The-Overwhelming-Presence-of-Nero-in-Early-Apocalypse-Commentaries.pdf.

[63] . Edward Champlin, *Nero* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 10-2, 29-31.

[64] . Nero killed his mother.

[65]. Both Peter and Paul were martyred during the Neronian persecution.

[66]. Robert Henry Charles, ed., *The Ascension of Isaiah* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917), IV, 37-9.

[67]. Milton S. Terry, ed., *The Sibylline Oracles* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1899), III.592, IV.154-159, V.125-130, 187-189, 295-298, 488-493, 501-508, 548, VIII.92, 203.

[68]. Ibid., V.39-42,48-9.

[69]. Victorinus, "On the Apocalypse of John," 17, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century* , vol. 7, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 357-8.

[70]. Commodianus, "The Instructions of Commodianus in Favour of Christian Discipline," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century* , vol. 4, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 211.

[71]. Commodianus, "Carmen de duobus populis," The Latin Library, accessed May 20, 2013, http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/commodianus/commodianus1.html.

[72]. Gleason L. Archer Jr., trans. *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Press, 1958), 133, quoted in Gumerlock, "The Overwhelming Presence of Nero," 7.

[73]. John Chrysostom, "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians," IV, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series: Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* , vol. 13, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 389.

[74]. Sulpitius Severus, "Sacred History," II.29, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series: Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian* , vol. 11, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 111.

[75]. Otto J. Mänchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in their History and Culture* , ed. Max Knight (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 2-3.

[76]. Sulpitius Severus, "Dialogues," II.14, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series: Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian* , vol. 11, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 45.

[77]. James D. G. Dunn and John William Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 1556-7.

[78]. Isopsephy (Romanized Greek: *isos* – "equal"; *psephos* – "stones") designates the practice of adding numerological value to the letters of a word in order to form a single number. Ancient Greeks used stones arranged in certain patterns to teach arithmetic and geometry. The Latin equivalent of *psephos* is *calculi* , the root of the modern words "calculus" and "calculation." Isopsephy is also related to *gematria* , a practice that uses the Hebrew alphabet.

[79]. Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 540-1.

[80]. Societas Aperiendis Fontibus and Theodor Mommsen, eds., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi - Chronica Minora , Saec. IV,VVI,VII* , vol. 9 (Berlin: Berolini Apud Weidmannos, 1892), 194; Gumerlock, "The Overwhelming Presence of Nero," 10-2.

[81]. Lactantius, "Of the Manner in which the Persecutors Died," II.7, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century* , vol. 7, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 302.

[82]. St. Augustine, "City of God," XX.19, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series: St. Augustine: City of God, Christian Doctrine* , vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 438.

[83]. Eusebius, *On the Theophania* , ed. Samuel Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1843), 246, 251, 253.

[84]. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," V.29, 558.

[85]. Ibid., V.30, 559.

[86]. For details, see James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* , vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010).

[87]. "Revelation of John," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century* , vol. 8, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 582.

[88]. Ben Zion Wacholder, "Biblical Chronology in the Hellenistic World Chronicles," *The Harvard Theological Review* 61, no. 3 (1968): 451-2, accessed July 30, 2012, doi:10.1017/S0017816000029278.

[89]. In the 20th century the American monk Seraphim Rose adjusted the date of Theophilus at 5530 BC, in order to admit that there was no year 0 (Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man: The Orthodox Christian Vision* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), 236).

[90]. Julius Africanus, "Extant Writings," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Fourth Century* , vol. 6, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 125-40.

[91]. William Smith and Henry Wace, eds., *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines; During the First Eight Centuries* , vol. 3 (London: John Murray, 1882), 52.

[92]. Samuel Shuckford, *The Sacred and Profane History of the World Connected. With the Treatise on the Creation and Fall of Man* , vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1848), 405-21.

[93]. Andrew Galloway and Stephen A. Barney, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman C Passūs 20-22; B Passūs 18-20 - Volume 5 of The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 69. Fragments of *Chronographiai* can also be found in *Chronicon Paschale* (7th century), in the works of the Byzantine chronicler George Syncellus (8th century), or in the writings of Cedrenus (11th century).

[94]. William Adler and Paul Tuffin, eds., *The Chronography of George Synkellos: A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), lxxi.

[95]. Ibid., lxiii-lxv.

[96]. C. Philipp E. Nothaff, *Dating the Passion: The Life of Jesus and the Emergence of Scientific Chronology (200-1600)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 65-8.

[97]. Stephen A. Barney *et al.* , eds., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), V.39, 130-3.

[98]. In addition to the years of a king's reign, the Israelites also used as a chronological landmark the Exodus from Egypt. During the Babylonian bondage Ezekiel counted the years starting from the first deportation (Ezekiel 1:1-2), and in the Greek period the Seleucid Era was counted (1 Maccabees 1:11).

[99]. John Jackson, *Chronological Antiquities: Or, The Antiquities and Chronology of the Most Ancient Kingdoms, from the Creation of the World, for the Space of Five Thousand Years* , vol. 1 (London, 1752), 121-5.

[100]. Ken Johnson, *Ancient Post-Flood History* (Maitland: Xulon Press, 2006), 9, 15-7.

[101]. Nothaff, *Dating the Passion* , 45-9.

[102]. Daniel Thompson Taylor, *The Voice of the Church on the Coming and Kingdom of the Redeemer, Or, A History of the Doctrine of the Reign of Christ on Earth* (New York: J. M. Fairchild & Co., 1855), 66.

[103]. Belyeu, *Revelation in Context* , 11-2.

[104]. Ibid., 186.

[105]. Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” V.28, 557.

[106]. Hippolytus, “The Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus. On Daniel,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century* , vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 179.

[107]. Virgil, *The Aeneid of Virgil* , trans. Theodore C. Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908), 13-4.

[108]. Lactantius, “The Divine Institutes,” VII.25, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century* , vol. 7, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 220.

[109]. Mänchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns* , 1-5.

[110]. Tertullian, “The Five Books Against Marcion,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Latin Christianity* , vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 342-4.

[111]. Mal Couch, ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 38-9.

[112]. Francis X. Gumerlock, “Millennialism and the Early Church Councils: Was Chiliasm Condemned at Constantinople?,” *Fides et Historia* 36, no. 2 (2004): 83-95.

[113]. St. Augustine, “City of God,” XXII.30, 509-11.

[114]. Jerome, “Commentary on Ezekiel. Preface to Book i,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series: Jerome: Letters and Selected Works* , vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 500.

[115]. Alan Dearn, “Persecution and Donatist Identity in the *Liber Genealogicus* ,” in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* , ed. Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 126-36.

[116]. Societas Aperiendis Fontibus and Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* , 195; Henry A. Sanders, “The Number of the Beast in Revelation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 37, no. 1 (1918): 95-6, accessed February 20, 2014, doi: 10.2307/3259148.

[117]. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 41-4.

[118]. Timothy Reuter, trans., *Annals of Fulda* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 26-7.

[119] . Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 48.

[120] . John Williams, “Purpose and Imagery in the Apocalypse Commentary of Beatus of Liébana,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* , ed. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 217-8.

[121] . Ibid., 224; Beatus, *Sancti Beati, presyteri hispani Liebanensis, in Apocalypsin, ac plurimas utriusque foederis paginas Commentaria...* , ed. Henrici Florez (Matriti, 1870), xxxiii-xlii; Kevin R. Poole, “Beatus of Liébana: Medieval Spain and the Othering of Islam,” in *End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity* , ed. Karolyn Kinane and Michael A. Ryan (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), 47-66.

[122] . John Williams, “Purpose and Imagery,” 225-7.

[123] . The exact word used in the text is *Hermolaos* , which comes from Romulus, one of the founders of the city of Rome.

[124] . *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* , V:16, in Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens en Orient byzantin* (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010), 209-10.

[125] . Another influential source was *Epistolae Saraceni* , written by an Eastern Christian and translated into Latin from Arabic. It is interesting that in *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* the Jews associated the Byzantine Empire, which was still dominating Palestine, with the fourth beast from Daniel (Walter Emil Kaegi Jr., “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest,” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 38, no. 2 (1969): 139-49, accessed June 20, 2012, doi:10.2307/3162702).

[126] . Williams, “Purpose and Imagery,” 229-33.

[127] . Bede, *Excerptis seu Collectaneis* , in Duncage Glossar. med. Et infimae Latinitatis, II, 407, quoted in Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* , vol. 12 (London: John Murray, 1839), 406.

[128] . Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 15-8.

[129] . David Woods, “On the Death of the Empress Fausta,” *Greece & Rome* 45, no. 1 (1988): 70-86, accessed June 20, 2012, doi:10.2307/3162702.

[130] . The sibyls were prophetess who delivered revelations during states of frenzy. *Libri Sibyllini* (the “Sibylline Books”) should not be confused with *Oracula Sibyllina* (the “Sibylline Oracles”).

[131] . Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen: Pseudomethodius, Adso und die Tiburtinische Sibylle* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1898), 185.

[132] . Ibid., 186.

[133] . Ibid.

[134] . Paul Julius Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* , ed. Dorothy deF. Abrahamse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 36-51, 151-86.

[135] . Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de l'Europe des invasions au XVIe siècle* , ed. Jacques Pirenne (Paris: Office de Publicité, 1939), 46-56; James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1864), 21-4.

[136] . Pirenne, *Histoire de l'Europe des invasions au XVIe siècle* , 53; Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* , 22; John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1989), 378.

[137] . Frederick Lorenz, *The Life of Alcuin* , trans. Jane Mary Slee (London: Thomas Hurst, 1837), 73-5, 208-9; Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* , 25.

[138] . Roger Collins, *Charlemagne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 151; Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* , 26; Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* , trans. Bernard Miall (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1958), 233.

[139] . Gumerlock, "The Overwhelming Presence of Nero," 9, 15; Beatus, *Sancti Beati* , 138, 438, 441, 498-500.

[140] . Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* , 26-9.

[141] . Richard Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 75, no. 1 (2000): 144-5.

[142] . Gustav Teres, "Time Computations and Dionysius Exiguus," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 15, no 3 (1984): 177-88.

[143] . Flavius Josephus, *The works of Flavius Josephus* , trans. William Whiston (Baltimore: Armstrong & Berry, 1839), 351, 449.

[144] . John P. Pratt, "Yet Another Eclipse for Herod," *The Planetarian* 19, no. 4 (1990): 8-14.

[145]. Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 267.

[146]. Bede, *The Reckoning of Time* , trans. Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), xxx, lxvii-lxxi, 157-237, 353-66, 405-15.

[147]. Richard Landes, "Giants With Feet of Clay: On the Historiography of the Year 1000," Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, accessed October 10, 2010, http://www.mille.org/scholarship/1000/AHR9.html.

[148]. Georges Duby, *Anul 1000* , trans. Maria Ivănescu (Iaşi: Polirom, 1996), 38.

[149]. Claude Carozzi and Huguette Tavianni-Carozzi, *La fin des temps: terreurs et prophéties au Moyen Age* (Paris: Stock, 1982), 186-94; Benjamin Arnold, "Eschatological Imagination and the Program of Roman Imperial and Ecclesiastical Renewal at the End of the Tenth Century," in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050* , ed. Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 271-5.

[150]. Adson de Montier-en-der, *Libellus de Antichristo* , ed. Daniel Verhelst (Turnhout: Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaeualis, 1976), 26, quoted in Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000," 118.

[151]. Landes, "Giants With Feet of Clay."

[152]. The Papal States must not be confused with the Papal State. The Papal States (plural) designate the territories mentioned above, while the Papal State (singular) refers to the Vatican, an enclave within the city of Rome. The Papal States had a predominantly political character, comprising territories under the direct rule of the Papacy.

[153]. The "Third Rome" refers to the idea that a certain European city or state is the successor of the Roman Empire (the First Rome) and of the Byzantine Empire (the Second Rome). The bases of this concept were put by Constantine the Great when he moved the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Constantinople became known as the "New Rome" or the "Second Rome" because it preserved the Roman spirit. And after the fall of the Constantinople in 1453 Moscow was nominated as the "Third Rome" or the "New Rome" because Russia was seen as the most representative successor of Orthodox Christianity. This image was confirmed when Ivan III married Sophia Palaiologina, a niece of Constantine IX, the last Byzantine emperor. In this way Ivan could pretend that he was the successor of the Byzantines, making a *translatio imperii* like Otto. In the beginning, the concept of the Third Rome had no imperialistic significance, but rather apocalyptic and religious. The purpose was to distinguish Russia as the only country that preserves the purity of Christendom in the great ocean of Catholic heresy (Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5, 165-71; Alar Laats, "The Concept of the Third Rome and Its Political Implications," *ENDC Proceedings* 12 (2009): 98-113).

[154]. Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization, 400-1500,* trans. Julia Barrow (Oxford: Blackwell

Publishers, 1992), 171-2.

[155]. Duby, *Anul 1000* , 215-9.

[156]. Eckhard Müller-Mertens, "The Ottonians as Kings and Emperors," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume 3, c.900-c.1024* , ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 257-60.

[157]. Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000," 119; Duby, *Anul 1000* , 34.

[158]. John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Apogee* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 253-9.

[159]. John France, Paul Reynolds and Neithard Bulst, eds., *Rodulfi Glabri Historiarum Libri Quinque, Eiusdem Auctoris Vita Domni Willelmi Abbatis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 170-1, 4.1, quoted in Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000," 135.

[160]. Duby, *Anul 1000* , 40.

[161]. Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000," 126-7.

[162]. Abbo of Fleury, *Apologeticus ad Hugonem et Rodbertum reges Francorum* (*Patrologia Latina* 139:471-72), quoted in David C. Van Meter, "Selected Documents on Eschatological Expectations and Social Change around the year 1000," in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050* , ed. Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 338.

[163]. Robert Burchard Constantijn Huygens, "Un témoin de la crainte de l'an 1000: La lettre sur les Hongrois," *Latomus* 15 (1956): 231, II.94-106, quoted in Daniel Verhelst, "Adso of Montier-en-Der and the Fear of the Year 1000," in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050* , ed. Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 89.

[164]. For details, see Milton McCormick Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Aelfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: Toronto University Press), 1977.

[165]. Charles Loizeau de Grandmaison, "Chartularium sancti jovini: cartulaire de Saint-Jouin les Marnes," in *Mémoires de la Société de statistique du département des Deux-Sèvres* , vol. 17 (Niort: Imprimerie de L. Favre et Cie, 1854), 1, 11, 17, quoted in Richard Landes, "The Apocalyptic Dossier: 967-1033," Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, accessed October 11, 2009, http://www.bu.edu/mille/scholarship/1000/1000-dos.html.

[166]. Landes, "The Apocalyptic Dossier: 967-1033."

[167]. Bethurum Wulfstan, ed., *Secundum Marcum* [n. 49], 136-7, v.44-7, quoted in Landes, "Giants With Feet of Clay."

[168]. Samuel John Crawford, ed., "Byrhtferth's Manual," *Early English Text Society* , Original Series 177 (London, 1972), 242, II.3-9, quoted in Landes, "Giants With Feet of Clay."

[169]. Niethard Bulst, "Rodulfus Glabers Vita domni Willelmi abbatis. Neue Edition nach einer Handschrift des 11. Jahrhunderts" (Paris, Bibl. nat., lat. 5390), in *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* , no. 30 (München, 1974), 485, quoted in Landes, "The Apocalyptic Dossier: 967-1033."

[170]. Richard Landes, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History: Ademar of Chabannes, 989-1034* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1995), 131-54.

[171]. Landes, "The Apocalyptic Dossier: 967-1033."

[172]. A supernova is a stellar explosion. The supernovas are extremely bright, but they disappear from sight in a couple of weeks or months.

[173]. Landes, "The Apocalyptic Dossier: 967-1033."

[174]. Duby, *Anul 1000* , 108.

[175]. Raoul Glaber, *Hist.* , IV, 9, quoted in Ibid., 108-9.

[176]. Raoul Glaber, *Hist.* , II, 2, V, 1, II, 7, quoted in Duby, *Anul 1000* , 113.

[177]. Raoul Glaber, *Hist.* , 4-5, II, 7, II, 11, quoted in Duby, *Anul 1000* , 114-7.

[178]. Duby, *Anul 1000* , 86.

[179]. Ibid., 208-9.

[180]. Divine letters, with or without apocalyptic tint, began to circulate in the first centuries of the Christian era. Eusebius reproduced a document apparently written by Jesus himself, entitled "The answer of Jesus to the ruler Abgarus by the courier Ananias." Augustine and Jerome stated that Jesus wrote nothing during his life. The text was declared apocryphal by Pope Gelasius I and a Roman synod in 495 AD (Eusebius, "Church History," I.13, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series: Eusebius: Church History* , vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 101-2).

[181]. David C. Van Meter, "The Peace of Amiens-Corbie, and Gerard of Cambrai's Oration on the Three Functional Orders: The Date, the Context, the Rhetoric," *Revue belge de philology et d'historire* 74, no. 3-4 (1996): 653.

[182]. Duby, *Anul 1000* , 182-4.

[183]. Landes, “The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000,” 136.

[184]. Raoul Glaber, *Hist.* , IV, 6, quoted in Duby, *Anul 1000* , 184.

[185]. Samuel John Crawford, ed., “Byrhtferth’s Manual,” *Early English Text Society* , Original Series 177 (London, 1972), 242, quoted in Landes, “The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000,” 103.

[186]. Adémar of Chabannes, *Chron.* , III, 46-7, quoted in Duby, *Anul 1000* , 125.

[187]. Regula Meyer Evitt, “Eschatology, Millenarian Apocalypticism, and the Liturgical Anti-Judaism of the Medieval Prophet Plays,” in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050* , ed. Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 205-29.

[188]. Adémar of Chabannes, *Chron.* , III, 52, 35, quoted in Duby, *Anul 1000* , 153.

[189]. Landes, “The Apocalyptic Dossier: 967-1033.”

[190]. In our days there is a trace of this thing: in the Armenian language “Antichrist” is pronounced *Neren* (Gumerlock, “The Overwhelming Presence of Nero,” 1-5, 10).

[191]. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* , 136-50.

[192]. *Codex Vaticanus Syriacus* , 566, quoted in Edmund Beck, “Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones III,” in Universitatis Catholicae Americae et Universitatis Catholicae Lovaniensis, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 320, *Scryptores Syri* no. 138 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1972), 60-71.

[193]. Carl Paul Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den zwei letzten Jahrhunderten des kirchlichen Altertums und dem Anfang des Mittelaters* (Oslo: Christiania, 1890), 208-20.

[194]. “So the king of the north shall come, and cast up a mound, and take a well-fortified city: and the forces of the south shall not stand, neither his chosen people, neither shall there be any strength to stand” (Daniel 11:15).

[195]. *Codex Vaticanus Syriacus* no. 58, quoted in Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* , 44.

[196]. Duby, *Anul 1000* , 222.

[197] . Edward Peters, *The First Crusade: "The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres" and Other Source Materials* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 25-37; Paul Halsall, "Medieval Sourcebook: Urban II (1088-1099): Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095, Five versions of the Speech," Fordham University. The Jesuit University of New York, accessed July 20, 2013, http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/urban2-5vers.html#Fulcher.

[198] . *Historia quae dicitur Gesta Dei per Francos* , in *Recueil des historiens des croisades. Historiens occidentaux* , IV.2, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1879), quoted in Peters, *The First Crusade* , 35-6.

[199] . *Roberti Monachi historia Hierosolymitana* , in *Recueil des historiens des croisades. Historiens occidentaux* , III.9, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1868), quoted in Peters, *The First Crusade* , 28.

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[201] . Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades: The First Crusade and the Foundation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 113; Kenneth M. Setton and Marshall W. Baldwin, eds., *A History of the Crusades: The First Hundred Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 258; Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1916), 225, 241-2.

[202] . John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: Decline and Fall* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1996), 33.

[203] . August C. Krey, ed., *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 38-43.

[204] . Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 48.

[205] . Susan B. Edgington, ed., *Albert of Aachen: Historia Ierosolimitana. History of the Journey to Jerusalem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 59.

[206] . Norman Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 123.

[207] . Ibid., 125.

[208] . Ibid., 123.

[209] . Ibid., 218; Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 100-6.

[210] . Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy* , 123.

[211] . Riley-Smith, *The Crusades* , 26-9; Tyerman, *God's War* , 96-100; Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , 233.

[212] . Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* , 274.

[213] . Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 163-87.

[214] . Tyerman, *God's War* , 153-7.

[215] . Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , 239-40.

[216] . Setton and Baldwin, *A History of the Crusades* , 340.

[217] . "The life of Muhammad: An Inconvenient Truth," The Religion of Peace, accessed January 10, 2018, https://www.thereligionofpeace.com/pages/muhammad/life-of-muhammad.aspx.

[218] . Jo Ann Hoeppner Moran Cruz, "Popular Attitudes toward Islam in Medieval Europe," in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* , ed. Michael Frassetto and David R. Blanks (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 57-8.

[219] . Hugh Goddard, *A History of Muslim-Christian Relations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 95-6; Kenneth M. Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1992), 4-15.

[220] . Hoeppner Moran Cruz, "Popular Attitudes toward Islam in Medieval Europe," 69-72.

[221] . Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam* , 1-5.

[222] . Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 16.

[223] . Daniel J. Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism: Representation of Islam in Sixteenth-and-Seventeenth Century Europe," in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* , ed. Michael Frassetto and David R. Blanks (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 225-6.

[224] . Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam* , 1-15; Goddard, *A History of Muslim-Christian Relations* , 83.

[225] . Hillel Schwartz, *Century's End: An Orientation Manual toward the Year 2000* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1996), 42.

[226] . Hoeppner Moran Cruz, "Popular Attitudes toward Islam in Medieval Europe," 58; Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism," 208.

[227] . Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism," 216.

[228] . Hoeppner Moran Cruz, "Popular Attitudes toward Islam in Medieval Europe," 69.

[229] . Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 321.

[230] . Norris J. Lacy, ed., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation,* vol. 1, trans. Carol J. Chase (New York: Garland, 1992), 77-90.

[231] . *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (London: Penguin, 2005), 104-11.

[232] . Gumerlock, "The Overwhelming Presence of Nero," 9; Beatus, *Sancti Beati* , 441.

[233] . Raoul Glaber, *Hist.* , IV, 4-5, II, 7, II, 11, quoted in Duby, *Anul 1000* , 121-2.

[234] . Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completes 197 – Sancta Hildegardis Abbatissa* (Parisiis: Usines Brepols, 1882), 268-71.

[235] . Gustav Schnürer, "States of the Church," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church* , vol. 14, ed. Charles George Herbermann *et al.* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 261-2.

[236] . Desiderio abbate Casinensis, *Dialogi de miraculis Sancti Benedicti* , II, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores* (MGH.SS) XXX.2 (Hannover, 1934), 141, quoted in Imma Penn, *Dogma Evolution and Papal Fallacies* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2007), 211.

[237] . For details, see Imma Penn, *Dogma Evolution and Papal Fallacies* .

[238] . Christopher Bush Coleman, *The Treatise of Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 12-9.

[239] . Henry Charles Lea, "The Donation of Constantine," *The English Historical Review* 10, no. 37

(1895): 86-7, accessed February 10, 2012, doi:10.1093/ehr/X.XXXVII.86.

[240]. Johannes Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini: The Misinterpretation of a Fiction and Its Original Meaning* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 7-35.

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[242]. Paul Halsall, "Unam Sanctam," Fordham University. The Jesuit University of New York, accessed March 13, 2012, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/b8-unam.asp.

[243]. Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy: The Inferno* , trans. John A. Carlyle (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851), 203-4.

[244]. Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 104-6, 111-4.

[245]. Malcolm Barber, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 171; Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , 97-102.

[246]. Barber, *The Two Cities* , 163; Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* , 46-51; Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , 482-8.

[247]. William of Newborough, *The History of William of Newburgh* , 29, in *The Church Historians of England* , vol. 4, II, trans. Joseph Stevenson (London: Seeley's, 1856), 424.

[248]. Ibid., 425-6.

[249]. For details, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Reading on the Saints* , trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[250]. Mario Gregorio, "Joachin Da Fiore & Anselmo Bishop of Marsico," Propheties On Line, accessed June 20, 2012, http://www.propheties.it/mystics/gioachino.htm.

[251]. Joachim represented Trinity as a geometrical form through the famous symbol "Shield of the Trinity." This is a diagram of triangular shape; in each corner is placed one of the persons of the Trinity, and in its center is placed the word "God." Each of the persons of the Trinity is in relation to each other, and each person is in relation to the word "God." The relations between the persons are categorized through the word "is not," and each of the relations between the persons and "God" are categorized through the word "is." All possible relations of the diagram reveal the following Trinitarian features: (1) the Father is God, (2) the Son is God, (3) the Holy Spirit is God, (4) God is the Father, (5) God is the Son, (6) God is the Holy Spirit, (7) the Father is not the Son, (8) the Son is not the Father, (9) the Father is not the Holy Spirit, (10) the Holy Spirit is not the Father, (11) the Son is not the Holy

Spirit, (12) the Holy Spirit is not the Son (Frederick Roth Webber and Ralph Adams Cram, *Church Symbolism* (Cleveland: The Central Litograph Co., 1938), 39-48; Gregorio, "Joachin Da Fiore & Anselmo Bishop of Marsico").

[252]. Gregorio, "Joachin Da Fiore & Anselmo Bishop of Marsico"; Delno C. West and Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, *Joachim of Fiore: A Study in Spiritual Perception and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 7.

[253]. In 1615, four centuries after Joachim, Galileo Galileo noted in a letter to the Grand Duchess of Tuscany: "In my mind God wrote two books. The first book is the Bible, where humans can find the answers to their questions on values and morals. The second book of God is the book of nature, which allows humans to use observation and experiment to answer our own questions about the universe" (Galileo Galilei, *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo* , trans. Stillman Drake (Toronto: Anchor Books, 1957), 173).

[254]. "Kraus 13, Etymologiae. Isidori Iunioris Hispalensis Episcopis Epistola. (1472)," Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, accessed May 12, 2015, http://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/krausmaps/details.cfm?mapId=41.

[255]. West and Zimdars-Swartz, *Joachim of Fiore* , 18, 41-50.

[256]. Ioachim de Flore , *Concordia Novi ac Veteris Testamenti* , 1199, V, folio 112, quoted in Gregorio, "Joachin Da Fiore & Anselmo Bishop of Marsico."

[257]. Gregorio, "Joachin Da Fiore & Anselmo Bishop of Marsico"; West and Zimdars-Swartz, *Joachim of Fiore* , 15-32, 64.

[258]. Yuri Rubinsky and Ian Wiseman, *A History of the End of the World* (New York: Morrow, 1982), 77-80.

[259]. The term "Franciscan" is used to designate the members of the Catholic religious orders who follow the "Rules of Saint Francis" and are usually part of the Franciscan Order.

[260]. Henry C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* , vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887), 11-2.

[261]. West and Zimdars-Swartz, *Joachim of Fiore* , 6.

[262]. Gregorio, "Joachin Da Fiore & Anselmo Bishop of Marsico"; Lea, *A History of the Inquisition* , 19-25.

[263]. Paul Halsall and David Burr, "Petrus Iohannis Olivi: Selections from the Apocalypse Commentary," Fordham University. The Jesuit University of New York, accessed May 19, 2011, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/olivi.asp.

[264]. Weber, *Apocalypses* , 54.

[265]. Peter John Olivi and Warren Lewis, *Peter John Olivi: Prophet of the Year 2000* (unpublished, Tübingen, 1972), 968, quoted in Halsall and Burr, "Petrus Iohannis Olivi."

[266]. Halsall and Burr, "Petrus Iohannis Olivi."

[267]. Ibid.

[268]. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition* , 120-2.

[269]. Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 401-15; Livarius Oliger, "Pierre Jean Olivi," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* , vol. 11, 245-6.

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[271]. Laura Ackerman Smoller, "Apocalyptic Calculators of the Later Middle Ages" (paper presented at *Knowing the Time, Knowing of a Time* - 3rd Annual Conference of the Center for Millennial Studies, Boston University, December 6-8, 1998, 3), accessed June 15, 2010, http://www.mille.org/publications/Confpro98/SMOLLER.PDF.

[272]. Juanita A. Daly, "Arnald of Vilanova: Physician and Prophet," in *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association* , vol. 4, ed. Richard W. Clement (Chicago: Loyola University, 1987), 29-30.

[273]. Weber, *Apocalypses* , 55; Ackerman Smoller, "Apocalyptic Calculators of the Later Middle Ages," 4; Sylvain Piron, "L'ecclésiologie franciscaine de Jean de Roquetaillade: A propos d'une édition récente," *Franciscan Studies* 65 (2007): 281-94.

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[279] . Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , 487-9; Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* , 159-82.

[280] . David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 77, 315-20, 429-36; Frassetto, *Heretic Lives* , 129-31; Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , 184-9.

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[282] . Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 53-5; Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* , 108-26.

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[287] . Justus Friedrich Carl Hecker, *The Epidemics of the Middle Ages* , trans. Benjamin Guy Babington (London: Trübner & Co., 1859), 30-47, 70-4.

[288]. Locke, *The Age of the Great Western Schism* , 289-94; Horrox, *The Black Death* , 111-49.

[289] . *Cronache senesi di Agnolo di Tura del Grasso* , ed. Alesandro Lisini and Fabio Iacometti, in *Rerum Italicum Scriptores. Racolta degli Storici Italiani* , vol. 15, VI, ed. Ludovico Antonio Muratori *et al.* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1931), 555.

[290]. Breve Chronicon Clerici Anonym, *Recueil des Chroniques de Flandre* , III, ed. J. J. de Smet (Brussels, 1856), 14-8, quoted in Horrox, *The Black Death* , 43-4.

[291]. Horrox, *The Black Death* , 154-7.

[292]. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline* , vol. 4, 1022; Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , 877.

[293]. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* , 129; Horrox, *The Black Death* , 150-4.

[294]. Niklaus Largier, *In Praise of the Whip: A Cultural History of Arousal* , trans. Graham Harman (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 105-7; Leslie A. St. L. Toke, "Flagellants," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church* , vol. 6, ed. Charles George Herbermann *et al.* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), 89-92.

[295]. Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* , 878.

[296]. Ibid.

[297]. Locke, *The Age of the Great Western Schism* , 64.

[298]. Fritz Klotz, *Speyer: Kleine Stadtgeschichte* (Speyer: Bezirksgruppe Speyer des Historischen Vereins der Historischen Vereins der Pfalz, 1988), 59; Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* , 129.

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[303]. Ackerman Smoller, "Apocalyptic Calculators of the Later Middle Ages," 4.

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[307]. John Hogue, *The Last Pope: The Decline and Fall of the Church of Rome: The Prophecies of St. Malachy for the New Millennium* (Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1998), 3, 35-7.

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[311]. Ibid., 188.

[312]. Ibid., 220.

[313]. Ibid., 238.

[314]. For details, see Hugh Jackson Lawlor, *St. Bernard of Clairvaux's Life of St. Malachy of Armagh* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1920); Hogue, *The Last Pope* , 175-83.

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[316]. Claude-François Menestrier, *La philosophie des images enigmatiques* (Lyon: Hilaire Baritel, 1694), 309-85.

[317]. Wion, *Lignum Vitae* , 311.

[318]. The same idea can be found in Deuteronomy 18:14; 1 Samuel 28:7-25; 1 Chronicles 10:13; Isaiah 8:19.

[319]. St. Augustine, "City of God," V.9, 91.

[320]. Lactantius, "The Divine Institutes," II.17, 65-6.

[321]. Hippolytus, "The Refutation of All Heresies," IV.27, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century* , vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 34.

[322]. Tertullian, "On Idolatry," 9, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Latin Christianity* , vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 65.

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[329]. Gaster, "The Letter of Toledo," 117-35.

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[331]. Nicholas Campion, *History of Western Astrology: The Medieval and Modern Worlds* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 59; Giovanni Paolo Marana, *Letters writ by a Turkish spy, who lived five and forty years undiscovered at Paris* , vol. 8, trans. William Bradshaw (London: A. Wilde, 1770), 243-4.

[332]. Ackerman Smoller, "Apocalyptic Calculators of the Later Middle Ages," 1-2.

[333]. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* , 135-70, 194-224.

[334]. Smoller, "The Alfonsine Tables and the End of the World," 212-6.

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[336]. Smoller, "The Alfonsine Tables and the End of the World," 217-8.

[337]. Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly (1351-1420)* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 85-6.

[338]. For details, see Louis Salembier, *Pierre d'Ailly et la decouverte de l'Amérique* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1912).

[339]. Smoller, "The Alfonsine Tables and the End of the World," 223.

[340]. Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy and the Stars* , 85-6; Weber, *Apocalypses* , 109.

[341]. Smoller, "The Alfonsine Tables and the End of the World," 229.

[342]. Triplicities are the divisions of the zodiac in four equal parts, each part containing a group of three houses. The division of the 12 houses in four equal parts was made in accordance with the four basic elements of the Universe: earth, water, air and fire. Thus, there is the Earth Triplicity (the signs of the zodiac of Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn), the Fire Triplicity (Aries, Leo and Sagittarius), the Air Triplicity (Gemini, Libra, Aquarius) and the Water Triplicity (Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces). Each sign is positioned in the zodiac at two signs distance from another sign of the same triplicity. The astrological year starts with the sign of Aries and ends with Pisces, and has nothing to do with the contemporary calendar year, where the first sign of the year is Capricorn (23rd of December – 19th of January). Thus, after the sign of Aries, the zodiac continues with Taurus, Gemini, Cancer and the same cycle repeats again with the signs of fire, earth, air and water.

[343]. Ackerman Smoller, "Apocalyptic Calculators of the Later Middle Ages," 5-6; Smoller, "The Alfonsine Tables and the End of the World," 226-9.

[344]. The indulgence (Latin: *indulgentia* – "kindness," "mercy") was a note of forgiveness of sins offered by the Catholic Church as the representative of God on the earth. It is believed that the number of indulgences obtained on the earth influence the suffering of the dead people in Purgatory waiting for Judgment.

[345]. Michael A. Mullett, *Martin Luther* (London: Routledge, 2004), 69-79.

[346]. The Hussite Wars lasted 13 years; even a crusade was organized against the Hussites. They had both a political purpose, to offer the Czech people a national identity and freedom from the German domination, and a religious purpose, to create a Czech Church independent of the Papacy (Thompson, *The End of Time* , 75-7; Rubinsky and Wiseman, *A History of the End of the World* , 88).

[347]. Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 271-4.

[348]. Ibid, 110-27, 141-57.

[349]. Ibid., 186, 339.

[350] . Abraham Friesen, “Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 4 (1986): 146; Paul Wappler, *Die Stellung Kursachsens und des Landgrafen Philipp von Hessen zur Täuferbewegung* (Münster: Aschendorffschen Buchhandlung, 1910), 13.

[351] . For details, see Manfred Bensing and Bernd Rüdiger, eds., *Thomas Müntzer: Politische Schrifien, Manifeste, Briefe* (Leipzig, 1973).

[352] . For details, see Klaus Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman: Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987).

[353] . For details, see Anthony Arthur, *The Tailor-King: The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

[354] . Cameron, *The European Reformation* , 326-39.

[355] . Anabaptism must not be mistaken with the Baptist movement. The latter was established in 1609 in Amsterdam, through the preaching of the English refugee John Smyth (Robert George Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 33-6).

[356] . Gibbon, *The History of the Decline* , vol. 4, 612.

[357] . Ron Corson, “The Ten Horns of Daniel. An Historical Perspective,” New Protestants, accessed June 12, 2012, http://newprotestants.com/HORNS4.HTM.

[358] . Ibid.

[359] . The Bishopric of Rome had a special status mainly because of the martyrdom of Peter the Apostle in 67 AD. Peter is also called the “Apostle of the Nations” because he had the greatest contribution at the Christianization of Europe. The first pope is considered to be Peter himself, and all the bishops of Rome that followed him had the role of pope. A second motive might be of political nature, because Rome was the heart of the empire (Alexander Clarence Flick, *The Rise of the Mediaeval Church and Its Influence on the Civilisation of Western Europe from the First to the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1909), 148-99).

[360] . William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* , vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1870), 1-98.

[361] . Steve Wohlberg, *End Time Delusions: The Rapture, the Antichrist, Israel, and the End of the World* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers, 2004), 95-9.

[362] . LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* , vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1948), 44-65, 528-9.

[363] . Steven Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 31, 217, 309, 399.

[364] . Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics 1531-46* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 97-114.

[365] . Martin Luther, *The Sermons of Martin Luther* , vol. 1, ed. John Nicholas Lencker (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 62.

[366] . Theodore Gerhardt Tappert, *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1959), 300-1.

[367] . Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 7.

[368] . Ivo Schneider, "Between Rosicrucians and Cabbala – Johannes Faulhaber's Mathematics of Biblical Numbers," in *Mathematics and the Divine* : *A Historical Study* , ed. Teun Koetsier and Luc Bergmans (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), 321; Garrett Mattingly, *The Armada* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005), 179.

[369] . *Morandi trial* , fol. 504r, deposition of Agostino Laponi, November 5, 1630, quoted in Bredan Maurice Dooley, *Science and the Marketplace in Early Modern Italy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 23.

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[371] . Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* , vol. 5 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 181.

[372] . Ibid., 182; Robert Collis, "Maxim the Greek, Astrology and the Great Conjunction of 1524," *Slavonic and East European Review* 88, no. 4 (2010): 601-23.

[373] . Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* , 215-6.

[374] . Abanes, *End-Time Visions* , 60; James Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus: The Prophecies of the World's Most Famous Seer* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1993), 238.

[375] . Nerio Malvezzi, "Il diario meteorologico di Andrea Pietramellara per l'anno 1524," *Atti e Memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Provincie di Romagna* , Terza serie, II (1884), 445-86, quoted in Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* , 231.

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[377] . Allen, *The Star-Crossed Renaissance* , 112-3.

[378] . Eric Miller, "Dating Sonnet 107: Shakespeare and the 'mortall Moone'," *The Oxfordian* 9 (2006): 66-80.

[379] . Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* , 310-1; North, *Stars, Minds and Fate* , 106-8.

[380] . Pierre Turrel, *Le Periode, cest a dire, la fin du monde, Concernant la disposition des chouses terrestres, par la vertu et influence des corps celestes, Compose par feu maitre Pierre Turrel, Philosophe et Astrologue, Recteur des escoles de Dijon* , Lyon, s.n., ca. 1550, fol. XXI [XXV], XXIIIv-XXIIII, quoted in Smoller, "The Alfonsine Tables and the End of the World," 235.

[381] . Smoller, "The Alfonsine Tables and the End of the World," 233; Ackerman Smoller, "Apocalyptic Calculators of the Later Middle Ages," 6-7.

[382] . Duncan Steel, *Eclipse: The Celestial Phenomenon that Changed the Course of History* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2001), 20-3.

[383] . Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* , 215-7, 221.

[384] . Edward Bishop Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticae, Or, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical* , vol. 4 (London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1862), 441-2.

[385] . Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus* , 240; Susanna Åkerman, *Rose Cross over the Baltic: The Spread of Rosicrucianism in Northern Europe* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 102-10.

[386] . Steel, *Eclipse* , 96-8.

[387] . Mattingly, *The Armada* , 176.

[388] . Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis* , 156-8; Åkerman, *Rose Cross over the Baltic* , 109-10.

[389] . Edgar Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2000), 15-22, 87, 89.

[390] . Ibid., 23-5; Pierre Brind'Amour, *Nostradamus astrophile: les astres et l'astrologie dans la vie et l'oeuvre de Nostradamus* (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1993), 23-4, 63-4.

[391]. Brind'Amour, *Nostradamus astrophile* , 43-4, 103.

[392]. Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* , 42-55.

[393]. Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus* , 27.

[394]. Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* , 326-38.

[395] . T. W. M. van Berkel, "Nostradamus and his contemporaries (Roussat, Videl, humanism)," Nostradamus, Astrology and the Bible, accessed January 25, 2015, http://www.nostradamusresearch.org/en/rslt/contemporaries.htm.

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[397] . Pierre Brind'Amour, *Nostradamus, les premières centuries ou propheties* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1996), 45-51, 108-12, 250-3.

[398] . Michel Nostradamus, Lee McCann and Charles A. Ward, *The Nostradamus Reader* (Radford: Wilder Publications, 2007) 225, 382-3.

[399]. Gregorio, "Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498)."

[400]. Nostradamus, McCann and Ward, *The Nostradamus Reader* , 94-103.

[401]. Peter Lemesurier, *Nostradamus, Bibliomancer: The Man, the Myth, the Truth* (Pompton Plains: Career Press, 2010), 80-8, 91.

[402]. Nostradamus, McCann and Ward, *The Nostradamus Reader* , 222-3, 275, 294, 386.

[403] . The entire original French text of *Les prophéties* can be found, for example, in Michel Nostradamus, *Les vrayes centuries et propheties de maistre Michel Nostradamus* , ed. Sève (Lyon: Chez Antoine Besson, 1691).

[404]. Rainer Frank Scheck, *Nostradamus* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 103-4; Brind'Amour, *Nostradamus astrophile* , 267; Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* , 576.

[405]. Horace Welby, *Predictions realized in modern times* (London: Kent and Co. Paternoster Row, 1862), 101-3.

[406]. For details, see Mario Reading, *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus* (New York: Sterling

Publishing Company, 2009).

[407] . The phrase *Pau, Nay, Loron* from VIII.1 – many times interpreted as an anagram of the expression *Napaulon Roy* ("King Napoleon") – refers to three cities in Southwestern France (Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus* , 207-11).

[408] . Quatrain II.24 contains the word *Hister* (which resembles "Hitler"), which is in fact the classic name of the Lower Danube (Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus* , 212-3).

[409] . Lemesurier, *Nostradamus, Bibliomancer* , 19-26, 65-79.

[410] . For details, see Jean Dupèbe, ed., *Nostradamus: Lettres inédites* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1983).

[411] . Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus* , 155, 182, 228.

[412] . For details, see David S. Montaigne, *Nostradamus, World War III, 2002* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2002).

[413] . The French original, which is *faire la guerre aux rochers* , literally translates as "to make war on the rocks," which means "to struggle fruitlessly," and it has nothing to do with the fight between two nobles (Brind'Amour, *Nostradamus, les premières centuries ou propheties* , 170).

[414] . Peter Lemesurier, *The Unknown Nostradamus* (New Alresford: John Hunt Publishing, 2003), 145-6; Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* , 671-2.

[415] . Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* , 583.

[416] . Benoit D'Andrimont, *Nostradamus 2242 Judgment Day* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2012), 160.

[417] . Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* , 435; Vlaicu Ionescu and Gelu Voican Voiculescu, eds., *Nostradamus: Epistola către Henri al II-lea* (Bucureşti: Evex & M&B, 1999), 180.

[418] . Peter Lemesurier, *Nostradamus: Ultimele Revelaţii* , trans. Dana Macovei (Bucureşti: Tempus, 1996), 166-82.

[419] . Mario Gregorio, "Nostradamus, X Century, 72nd Quatrain," Propheties On Line, accessed June 21, 2012, http://www.propheties.it/no/decima%20centuria/c10q72.htm.

[420] . Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* , 750; Peter Lorie, *Nostradamus 2003-2025: A History of the Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 17-22.

[421]. John Robert Colombo, *The Midnight Hour: Canadian Accounts of Eerie Experiences* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2004), 179.

[422]. Ibid., 178-81.

[423] . "The Idiot Heir. An Internet Hoax," Morgana's Observatory, accessed June 14, 2011, http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/election.htm.

[424] . Most hoaxes do not contain index numbers characteristic to the centuries and the quatrains. Nostradamus numbered all his quatrains in his original edition of *Les prophéties* , reaching the number 941. In this way, any suspicious quatrain can be verified in terms of existence and translation.

[425]. D'Andrimont, *Nostradamus 2242 Judgment Day* , 35-7.

[426]. John Hogue, "Osama and Mabus: New Nostradamus Revelations," HogueProphecy, accessed April 10, 2012, http://www.hogueprophecy.com/2011/05/osama-and-mabus-new-nostradamus-revelations/.

[427]. Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus* , 144; Reading, *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus* , 809-10.

[428]. Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* , 594.

[429]. Ackerman Smoller, "Apocalyptic Calculators of the Later Middle Ages," 7.

[430]. Mark Hitchcock, *2012, The Bible, and the End of the World* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2009), 75-8.

[431]. Lemesurier, *Nostradamus: Ultimele Revelaţii* , 258-64.

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[433]. Reading, *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus* , 855-60.

[434]. Lemesurier, *The Unknown Nostradamus* , 144.

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[436]. The Nostradamic quatrains have been recycled countless times. After 1999, in 2001 quatrain X.72 was recycled to support the prophecy of the terrorist attacks of the 11th of September in the so-

called anagram of 1999 (9-11-1).

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[440] . St. Ambrose, *Letter to Horontianus* , quoted in Herbert Thurston, “Use of Numbers in the Church,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* , vol. 11, 151.

[441] . St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* , III.30, quoted in Thurston, “Use of Numbers in the Church,” 151.

[442] . St. Augustine, “City of God,” XI.30, 223; the biblical citation can be found in *The Revised Standard Version of the Bible: Catholic Edition* , Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1966.

[443] . Barney *et al.* , *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* , III.4, 90.

[444] . For details, see Luca Pacioli and Leonardo da Vinci, *Divina proportione* (Venetiis: A. Paganius Paganinus, 1509).

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[446] . Teun Koetsier and Karin Reich, “Michael Stifel and his numerology,” in *Mathematics and the Divine* : *A Historical Study* , ed. Teun Koetsier and Luc Bergmans (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), 304-5.

[447] . A legend created around the 13th century by dissident groups said that Pope John VIII was in fact a woman disguised as a man whose real name was “Joan.” When her true gender was discovered, the subsequent Catholic leaders tried to erase her from the list of popes. But, given the fact that this thing was impossible, she was maintained under the name of “John VIII.” In reality, the source of the legend was the weak and effeminate character of Pope John VIII; most likely the jokes about John had been so distorted that from pope he became “popessa” (Patrick Madrid, *Pope Fiction* (Rancho Santa Fe: Basilica Press, 1998), 167-78).

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[449]. Ibid., 60-1; Cantor, “Stifel, Michael,” 212; Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis* , 133-9, 197; Koetsier and Reich, “Michael Stifel and his numerology,” 293, 307.

[450]. Schneider, “Between Rosicrucians and Cabbala,” 316.

[451]. Åkerman, *Rose Cross over the Baltic* , 103, 108.

[452]. Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis* , 133-9, 197.

[453]. John Napier, *A Plaine Discovery, of the Whole Revelation of S. Iohn* (Edinbvrgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1593), 1-5.

[454]. Ibid., 7-8, 14-6.

[455]. Koetsier and Reich, “Michael Stifel and his numerology,” 308; Weber, *Apocalypses* , 92.

[456]. Napier, *A Plaine Discovery* , 35-8, 41-8, 51-3, 59-60.

[457]. Koetsier and Reich, “Michael Stifel and his numerology,” 308-9.

[458]. Coleman, *The Treatise of Lorenzo Valla* , 13.

[459]. Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini* , 45, 148.

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[464]. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* , trans. W. F. Trotter (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), XI:727, 158. According to Revelation 13:18: “Here is wisdom”; and Daniel 12:10: “none of the wicked shall understand; but they that are wise shall understand.”

[465]. Schneider, “Between Rosicrucians and Cabbala,” 316.

[466]. Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis* , 200.

[467]. Nathaniel West, *The Thousand Year Reign of Christ: The Classic Work on the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1993), 296; Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers* , 218-24.

[468]. For details, see Richard Roussat, *Livre de l’estat et mutation des temps* ; Ackerman Smoller, “Apocalyptic Calculators of the Later Middle Ages,” 7.

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[473]. Edward Rosen, “Calvin’s Attitude Toward Copernicus,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21, no 3 (1960): 431-41; Edward Rosen, *Copernicus and His Successors* , ed. Erna Hilfstein (London: The Hambledon Press, 1995), 161-72.

[474]. *Revue de l’Historie des Religions* 179 (1971): 38, quoted in Rosen, *Copernicus and His Successors* , 159; Calvin based his position on Psalms 93:1: “The world also is established, that it cannot be moved.”

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[477]. “A time, and times, and half a time” from Revelation 12:14 was considered to be one and the same with “a time and times and half a time” from Daniel 7:25 (or in other versions of the Bible “a time, two times, and half a time”).

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(Saskatoon: Trans Continental, 2006), 386; Ovid E. Need Jr., *Death of the Church Victorious* (La Vergne: Lightning Source, 2002), 41-5.

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[490]. Thompson, *The End of Time* , 89; Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam* , 42.

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[593]. Ibid., 12, 198.

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[852]. Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* , 248-50.

[853]. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* , 378.

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[899]. White, *Testimonies for the Church* , 131-2.

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[914]. For details, see Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and health. With key to the Scriptures* (Bedford: Applewood Books, 1889).

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[935]. "Happy are Those Found Watching!," *The Watchtower* 105, no. 1 (1984): 14.

[936]. *The Watchtower* 40, no. 2 (1919): 6380, quoted in Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses* , 156.

[937]. *Golden Age* , March 1, 1922, 350, quoted in Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses* , 176.

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[939]. *The Watchtower* 73, no. 4 (1952): 117, quoted in Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses* , 274.

[940]. *Awake!* , October 8, 1968, 23, quoted in Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses* , 347.

[941]. *The Watchtower* 90, no. 6 (1969): 171, quoted in Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses* , 282.

[942]. Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* , 94-9.

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[946]. Gruss, *Jehovah's Witnesses* , 325-31.

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[948]. Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed* , 159-63, 172.

[949]. Ibid., 174-6.

[950]. Waxman, *History of the Jewish Literature* , 874-5.

[951]. Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2012), 3-27.

[952]. Ibid., 72.

[953]. Ibid., 70-1.

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[955] Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* , xli-xlii, 199-201; "Objectives," Temple Mount &EretzYisrael Faithful Movement – Jerusalem, accessed January 11, 2012, http://www.templemountfaithful.org/obj.htm.

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[962]. Arnold T. Olson, *Inside Jerusalem, City of Destiny* (Glendale: G/L Regal Books, 1968), 120, quoted in Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* , 191.

[963]. Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth, or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (New York: Cosimo, 2010), 155-9.

[964]. Until the 20th century the lack of rain waters was one of the reasons why Palestine was a poor and hardly productive land. But toward the end of the century, as more and more Jews returned to their homeland, a vast irrigation system was built. Currently, Israel has a thriving agriculture and it even exports food. From 1948 until 2010 Israel's population multiplied more than tenfold, from 600,000 to

seven millions, while the Gross Domestic Product per capita is higher than that of its neighbors, although the surrounding countries have rich resources of oil.

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[967]. Lewis, *UFOs and Popular Culture* , 31.

[968]. Ibid., 258-63.

[969]. For details, see for example Henry Stevens, *Hitler's Flying Saucers: A Guide to German Flying Discs of the Second World War* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2003).

[970]. Diana G. Tumminia, "Galactic Messenger! Overview of the Universal Industrial Church of the New World Comforter," in *Alien Worlds: Social and Religious Dimensions of Extraterrestrial Contact* , ed. Diana. G. Tumminia (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 42-58.

[971]. Lewis, *UFOs and Popular Culture* , 91.

[972]. Ibid., 266-8.

[973]. Ibid., 298-302.

[974]. Ibid., 37-9, 307.

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[977]. Lewis, *UFOs and Popular Culture* , 4-6.

[978]. Ibid., 7-10.

[979]. For details, see Stanley V. McDaniel and Monica Rix Paxson, eds., *The Case for the Face: Scientists Examine the Evidence for Alien Artifacts on Mars* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1998).

[980] . “Ancient Egyptians transported pyramid stones over wet sand,” Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter, accessed May 23, 2014, http://www.fom.nl/live/english/news/archives/pressreleases2014/artikel.pag?objectnumber=262373.

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[983] . Rick Ross, “A 1997 snapshot of ‘Gabriel of Sedona’,” Cult Education Institute, Trenton, accessed October 22, 2014, http://culteducation.com/group/799-global-community-communications-alliance/1325-a-1997-snapshot-of-gabriel-of-sedona-s.html.

[984] . Lewis, *UFOs and Popular Culture* , 146-9.

[985] . “Area 51” is the nickname of the military base Air Force Flight Test Center Detachment 3. The history of Area 51 begins in 1947 (the year of the Roswell incident), and between 1950 and 1960 a large number of secret aircrafts were developed here. It is speculated that the shipwreck from Roswell was brought to Area 51, alongside other alien spaceships found worldwide (according to the famous accounts of Bob Lazar in 1989, who claimed that he had worked in Area 51) (For details, see for example Phil Patton, *Dreamland: Travels Inside the Secret World of Roswell and Area 51* (New York: Villard, 1998)).

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[1020] . Assigning the success to internal or personal factors, and the failure to situational, out of control factors.

[1021] . The Western betrayal refers to the insincere external policy of a couple of Western states

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Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Harish S. and Liviu Bistrean for the suggestions, ideas, proofreading and critiques they brought to this edition. Their work and devotion greatly contributed to the formation of this paper.

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